As we bring this first part of the third volume to a close, we feel it necessary, as usual, to offer a brief note. During the period covered here, Mussolini's biography is inextricably linked not only to Italian political, economic, and social events, but also to international ones.

In a certain sense, one might even say that these events are increasingly taking center stage, exerting a growing influence on all others.

Hence the need—while our work remains strictly faithful to the biographical approach that, as must never be forgotten, is its defining characteristic—to broaden the "scope" of our discussion with insights into issues and events that, at first glance, may seem to fall somewhat outside the scope of Mussolini's biography, but which are, in fact, indispensable not only for providing the necessary backdrop to Mussolini's political actions, but also for assessing to what extent those actions stemmed from a deliberate choice by Mussolini himself and to what extent they were determined by a different logic—one inherent in the international reality of the time and, as such, shaped by a whole series of factors among which the Mussolini-led, Fascist, Italian factor was not, objectively speaking, the most significant.

This explains the extensive coverage of foreign policy in this volume and the particular way in which it is addressed. Specifically, because:

a) in order to ensure a precise and clear analysis, the foreign policy of the years prior to 1929 has been included in this volume;

b) while the discussion generally follows a chronological order, the most important individual aspects are addressed in "blocks" of issues that tend to provide a unified view of relations with certain countries, beginning at the point when those relations take on greater significance (and this explains why relations with certain countries in this part are either barely mentioned or not addressed at all, since they will be covered in the second part or even in the final volume, when they assume greater importance or reach "maturity").

A similar clarification, moreover, applies to domestic policy as well. Here, too, an effort has been made to follow the chronological progression as closely as possible.

As in the previous volume, however, this chronological approach has often been accompanied by a thematic presentation. This is why the reader will not find (or will find only briefly mentioned) in this first part of the third volume certain issues that we deemed more useful to address collectively later on. The most significant examples are those concerning the relationship between Mussolini and intellectuals, the myth of Rome and Roman identity, the mechanics of Fascism as a mass regime, and the similarities and differences between Fascism and National Socialism.

As in the past, there are many people we should thank for the documents, testimonies, and suggestions they have provided us. Since it is impossible to thank them all, we would like, as usual, to thank the board and the higher council of the Archives, as well as all the officials of the Central State Archives. We owe a very special thanks above all to Professors Ruggero Moscati and Giampiero Carocci of the Commission for the Publication of Diplomatic Documents, to whose generosity and cooperation we owe access to the documents of the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: without them, this work would have been practically impossible.

Many other people whom we should thank have passed away in recent years: for this reason, we feel a

double duty to remember them along with the others to whom our deepest gratitude goes: Ms. Nelia and Ms. Olga Turati, Mr. Gherardo Casini, Mr. Riccardo Del Giudice, Mr. Alberto De Stefani, Mr. Giuseppe Attilio Fanelli, Mr. Luigi Fontanelli, Mr. Giovanni Giuriati, Mr. Dino Grandi, Mr. Giorgio Pini, Mr. Gastone Silvano Spinetti, Mr. Duilio Susmel, and Mr. Leonardo Vitetti.

Nor can we forget our friends Elena Aga Rossi, Ennio Bozzetti, Luigi Goglia, Francesco Margiotta-Broglia, Massimo Mazzetti, Mario Missori, and Pietro Pastorelli.

Like the previous volumes, this one is also dedicated to the memory of Delio Cantimori.

RENZO DE FELICE.

Mussolini, the Duce. The Years of Consent. 1929, 1936.

1. Mussolini Facing the Reality of the Fascist Regime and Its Prospects at the Turn of the Decade.

By mid-1929, the Fascist regime had become a reality for Italy with well-defined and, in more ways than one, definitive characteristics and contours.

The Conciliation and the “plebiscite” had, in fact, effectively concluded the first phase of Fascist rule and had, in essence, sealed the completion of the process of structuring the regime itself.

In just under seven years of Fascist rule, the country’s political landscape had undergone a profound transformation, and however one might judge this change, there was no serious reason to believe that the regime would fall in the near future.

Despite the latent contradictions that characterized the balance among its components, the regime in fact enjoyed unquestionable stability, based primarily on a broad mass consensus that would not be undermined for a long time and over which, just in case, both the National Fascist Party (PNF) and the police maintained constant vigilance.

Moreover, this consensus—as paradoxical as it may seem—became increasingly genuine and widespread as it became less politicized and rooted less and less in allegiance to the PNF (which was losing prestige daily and arousing greater resentment) and more and more in the myth of Mussolini and of Italy finally “on the move.”

Neither the international situation nor, at that time, Fascist foreign policy suggested the possibility that the regime might fall due to external causes. On the contrary, it was precisely during this period that Fascist Italy began to see growing sympathy toward it abroad and to be regarded as a significant player on the international stage.

The fact that nothing suggested the regime would fall in the short term—and the consequent need to anticipate a long period of Fascist rule—gave rise to, and would continue to give rise to for several years (roughly until around 1932, after which Italians' attention would gradually shift more and more toward international organizations), two distinct types of reactions.

On the one hand, there were those for whom the fascist edifice was by then essentially complete and the task, therefore, was above all to administer the status quo. Referring to these people, B. Spampanato wrote in *Critica fascista* around the mid-1930s:

There are, in Italy—and even within the Party itself—some melancholic individuals who imagine the Fascist Revolution to have already passed into the realm of sacred national memories.

For them, the Regime is already complete in its construction and in its details; it is already perfect in its structures and appearance; it is already mature in spirit and consciousness. These people have what we might call a bureaucratic conception of the Revolution, and they rejoice if they can—perhaps as Fascists—return to the old conservative mindset. These gentlemen are the most blind apologists for a heavy-handed obedience—which has nothing to do with intelligent, conscious discipline—and for certain useless and harmful manifestations of the hierarchical concept itself. They live on memories that perhaps do not even belong to them. They subsist on the easy dividends of the past, of which they were often merely spectators. And if they accept the political reality of Fascism, they do so because they fear even a mere mental opposition, just as they shun—out of indolence—any controversial issue requiring introspection and, worse still, criticism.

Every now and then, these good people—exquisitely constitutional and generally anti-Fascist—are lured by Fascism.

Certain statements by the Leader reach these middle-class people in their dead calm, causing them to startle; they look on in dismay and seem to wonder whether this is Fascism or whether, by any chance, it is not just new nightmares threatening their peace.

This type of Italian and fascist was widespread and was the one who gave the country and fascism some of the distinctive, detrimental traits already typical of that era: a lack of personal ideas and critical sensibility, bureaucratic and conservative hierarchism, the narrow-minded and servile mentality of the "top of the class," the glorification of Fascism's merits, which, on closer inspection, served to preserve one's own personal position achieved thanks to it; the use of the clumsiest and most empty rhetorical flourishes; the systematic glorification of every act of the regime and, above all, of Mussolini's personality; and so on.

Alongside those who supported the status quo out of insensitivity, laziness, and self-interest—and who therefore feared any new change because it would inevitably create difficulties for them and endanger the personal positions they had attained—there were, however, also those who sincerely and honestly saw the status quo as a guarantee of stability for the country, the indispensable prerequisite for averting further upheavals and for a recovery of the Italian economy.

This position was held, in particular, by a large part of the business community, which was concerned, first, with regaining the ground lost due to the difficulties caused by the "90 percent quota" and, subsequently, with coping with the far more serious repercussions of the "Great Depression."

Essentially, the same can be said for a large part of the working class, which was also primarily interested in trying to recover the wage gains lost in previous years—or, at the very least, in avoiding further cuts, safeguarding their job security, and not running the risk of becoming the victims of experiments in which the vast majority of workers had no confidence and which they therefore feared.

On the other hand, there were those who were convinced that, with the Conciliation and the "plebiscite" marking the end of a very specific phase of Fascist rule, the new phase that had begun should be characterized by some significant changes.

Up to that point, rather than building, Fascism had demolished: it had destroyed the old liberal-democratic state and sought to uproot it from the country; to do so, it had established a regime of exception, under which, while much of the old had disappeared, little new had emerged.

A true revolution—and fascism, from its very inception, had been keen to present itself as such—once it had secured victory over its adversaries, could not continue indefinitely to act through exceptional measures and to subordinate the social sphere to the political one if it truly wished to gain credibility and to expand and activate the consensus surrounding it; in the political sphere, it had to find its own normality and a form of legality that was not coercive, and in the social sphere, it had to establish a new legal and social order that conformed as closely as possible to its program and to the aspirations of the country—especially that part of it which, for various and often conflicting reasons, had been hostile to the old order because it reproached it for a whole series of limitations and characteristics of very different kinds.

This second hope was fueled by young people—partly due to the natural exuberance of their age, and partly because they were encouraged by the much-discussed talk in the press about a "youth problem" and the need to harness their energy— partly out of opportunism and a desire to take advantage of the situation—to step forward, show off, and secure a position—and partly out of a sincere conviction regarding the need to bring new ideas to Fascism, ideas less directly influenced by the moral and political climate in which the first generation of Fascists had been formed (""Young people," as Bottai rightly observed in this regard in *Critica fascista*, "join the Party not only to make their presence felt, but with the desire to rethink everything from scratch")—they never missed an opportunity to proclaim the need for the regime to proceed along the newly opened path of profound transformations in Italian society.

There were those who merely hoped for a softening of the exceptional nature the regime had assumed, a gradual easing of tensions and liberalization.

Typical in this regard was the position of the former nationalist leader Enrico Corradini, as evidenced

by some of his notes discovered after his death by Federzoni and published by him a few years ago.

For Corradini, what was needed was “less Fascism and more Italy, less Party and more Nation, less revolution and more Constitution.”

Italy had moved from the “old regime”—a democratic-parliamentary system—to a personal dictatorship. What was now needed was to establish a truly “national and constitutional” regime:

for a dictatorship, by its very nature, could only be temporary and, in the long run, would reproduce the failings of the old regime it had sought to eliminate.

In a complex modern state, a dictatorship is burdened with a volume of affairs exceeding any human capacity. As a result, numerous and extensive areas of national life remain beyond oversight and at the mercy of corruption.

The consequences of all this—the consequences of an absolute personal government—are many and grave.

First, an extraordinary rise of a spirit of flattery and courtly servility.

Second: absolute government, by alienating the Nation—that is, its constituent elements, which are the citizens and social classes—from the exercise of genuine and responsible political activities, which cannot be such unless they are coupled with the right to debate and initiative, in which consists the true government of coordination and collaboration in national affairs; absolute government, as we were saying, ultimately results in general apathy and paralysis. It results in citizens’ disinterest in public affairs and ultimately generates individualistic atomism, much as the old regime did.

Third: absolute government leads to a veritable national demobilization. And this is utterly ahistorical in the wake of Vittorio Veneto…

Between the old regime and the personal regime lies the national and constitutional regime, which is the only good one. In modern political civilization, a nation admits of no other form of government.

In the new national regime—that is, one based on the coordination and collaboration of all productive national activities—the freedoms that constitute the very lifeblood of the nation's social organism must remain intact; namely, those necessary for the circulation and initiative of activities, for formation and renewal.

In short, these are the responsible capacities necessary for the creation and functioning of a ruling class. The personal regime does not produce a ruling class.

These notes by Corradini clearly reveal the position that the majority of former orthodox nationalists (that is, those who had not integrated into Fascism) had by then adopted or were in the process of adopting toward the regime and, in particular, their aspiration, as classical conservatives, to reduce Fascism to a mere instrument for achieving a modernized "return to the Statute," which—above all—would restore to them (and to the monarchy) that decisive role that Mussolini had instead assumed for himself.

Numerous moderate fascists, especially those of liberal and constitutionalist background, as well as broad sectors of sympathizers who had not had time or had not wished to join the fascist movement, also held partially similar positions. Among them were quite a few who would have welcomed the dissolution of the PNF, or a policy of national reconciliation with the émigré community and the non-Communist opposition, and even a cautious liberalization that, for some, might have gone so far as to authorize the formation of a few "loyalist" parties.

Moreover, individual liberalizing measures were not viewed unfavorably even by many true-blue Fascists. It is significant, to give just one example, that even among the latter there were those who would have liked to abolish the Special Court or not extend it beyond the five-year term for which it had initially been established (in 1931, that is), both because they considered it useless and counterproductive, and because they viewed it as an unjustified expression of distrust in the ordinary judiciary.

Nor should we forget that among quite a few old-guard Fascists—who had seen their hopes dashed for a Fascism that would radically transform the face of Italy and, by virtue of its revolutionary character, would penetrate deeply into the consciences of Italians—were beginning to worry about the fate that would befall the king in the event of Mussolini's sudden death, even if that eventuality did not occur, when they would be faced with the post-Mussolini era.

Fascism, the regime—they said—had failed in its goal of truly winning over the masses, who lived and prospered by virtue of and thanks to the Duce's prestige; yet it was out of the question that it could survive Mussolini. In anticipation of the Duce's passing, it was therefore necessary to lay the groundwork for a "return to monarchical normality," since only this could save what was good about Fascism and, at the same time, prevent a resurgence of bloody political struggles.

A comprehensive report from late 1931 is highly significant in this regard; it refers precisely to one of these groups of disillusioned old-guard fascists concerned about the future and, in particular, to the

reactions of some of its members (Marinetti, Carli, and Settimelli) to the sudden death, just a few days earlier, of Arnaldo Mussolini:

If on December 21 a tragic loss had torn the nation apart—and to be more precise, if on December 21 the Duce had died suddenly—what would have happened?

The mindset of those who aspire to succeed the Duce would be to continue with a dictatorship, clinging to the overwhelming power of the police, and to continue to rage against men, the masses, and the people!

This cannot be!

The nation would tolerate neither a dictatorship under His Excellency Ciano nor one under Farinacci!

The current dictatorship has worn people down: the leaders themselves have realized that all of Fascism's revolutionary goals have failed, and so they are now pursuing a day-to-day policy.

We must, therefore, have the courage to preserve what is good and just in Fascism and channel it toward a monarchical normality, restoring to minorities the rights that were suppressed yesterday and today for reasons of state.

In short, we must prepare the ground today—the political leaven for tomorrow—which can never lead to a second dictatorship, unless we wish to return to bloody conflicts between regions and people.

The Duce, having learned from sad examples, does not place excessive trust in anyone today and is always afraid of being betrayed: therefore, according to his innermost and hidden thoughts—one might accuse him of necessary political selfishness!—he would like the current situation to continue until his death.

Afterward? After his death, nothing can interest him except—as Settimelli said—leaving posterity a marvelous political legacy that will be remembered for no more than 48 hours.

We, on the other hand, are concerned not only with today but above all with tomorrow—that is, the post-Fascist era.

The Duce's inner circle certainly does not share our view; above all because they have staked everything on the Duce's fate, forcing him to maintain a policy of austerity that is at times unnecessary or excessive.

We, on the other hand, want the Duce to go down in history not as the "Man of Reaction," but as the "MAN OF THE PEOPLE."

He must be convinced that persisting with the current negative policy will lead to disastrous days; instead, he must be able to mingle with the people without the henchmen he inevitably needs today.

Therefore, for our ultra-fascist and post-fascist program, we must very slowly prepare the ground for tomorrow—without upheavals or concessions, calmly and with the certainty that tomorrow will still be ours. But with political normality, without rigidity, and without sowing further useless and harmful storms.

These moderate expectations and aspirations—always very cautious and never explicitly voiced in public—were countered by the intransigent and more properly "revolutionary" views of the younger generation.

There was talk from many quarters of a "third phase" of the "Fascist revolution," to be carried out both in the political sphere and, above all, in the social sphere. Although Fascism had long since set aside its initial plans to abolish or transform the Senate, and despite the recent "reform" of political representation (which had led to the "plebiscite"), there were those who refused to consider this arrangement definitive and who would have liked to further fascistize Parliament and, above all, transform or abolish the Senate, where too many "lukewarm supporters or opponents of fascism" sat.

Similarly, there were many who were convinced of the need to thoroughly purge and fascistize the armed forces, the judiciary, schools, universities, and the public administration.

Finally, there were also those who, deep down, were still waiting for the moment when Mussolini would finally rid himself of the monarchy.

More than in the immediate political sphere, however, the “third phase” was viewed and hoped for in the social sphere. Here, the focal point of every discussion became the implementation of the corporatist system, regarding which the most diverse and often radically conflicting ideas were circulating and being publicly expressed.

Faced with the question of what substance should be given to corporatism and what its economic and social objectives should be, each of the various “strands” of Fascism felt compelled—more so than on any other issue—to take a stand; all the more so because—since corporatism was one of the major issues on the fascist agenda—weighing in on it was a right and duty of every good fascist; thus, at least initially (roughly until mid-1933), there were no difficulties in publicly expressing one’s views, especially in specialized journals and in local and youth periodicals.

Nor should we underestimate the fact that, at that time, the discourse on corporatism could easily provide an opportunity to engage in a whole series of other discussions that would otherwise not have been possible: for example, those concerning the liberal system and, above all, the Soviet system, its achievements, and its distinctive features.

And in fact, between 1930 and 1932, many such discussions took place, so much so that by the end of 1930 there were already those who expressed concern about them (for example, U. D’Andrea, who wrote irritably in *Politica*: “Has it become fashionable in the Italian press—and especially in newspapers that seek to represent the more youthful trends—to demand objectivity regarding Russian affairs?”; and in many cases, these discussions revealed a tendency to judge the Soviet regime with an eye focused more on its concrete achievements than on Bolshevik ideology, to place it almost on the same level as corporatist fascism—in that both represented a transcendence of the liberal-democratic system (i.e., capitalism)—and even to envisage the possibility of a future rapprochement with Moscow.

Among the various quotations that could be cited in this regard, we will limit ourselves to just one, taken not from one of the many youth periodicals—which, while interesting and significant, lack authority—but from *Critica fascista*, the magazine published at that time by the Minister of Corporations:

Far be it from me to glorify communism, but far be it also from me to condemn a theory a priori simply because it is called communist and I consider myself a fascist… Russia and Italy are united in the creative effort to establish a new order, and for me, the beauty of their work lies in this very effort.

Today, a crusade by Rome against Moscow would inevitably result in a wave of reaction, and fascism —as a typical evolution—cannot desire this; Rome must first be able to radiate its light among other peoples, penetrate the vestiges of the past among them, and point the way to a future that for us is a reality already in progress, a present reality.

But in the meantime, Russian communism may have moved beyond its theoretical fundamentalism—through a gradual softening of its principles—toward a form of refined equilibrium not far removed

from our own; and by then, the dichotomy between Rome and Moscow will have lost its raison d'être along the way. For in the meantime, the two paths will have converged, even though they set out from opposite poles; even though one will have veered to the right due to events beyond any human control, and the other will have leaned to the left by virtue of its fundamental creative thought.

During the period that concerns us here, corporatism was still in its infancy, and beyond mere political and propagandistic statements and slogans, no one—whether at the political or theoretical level—had any real idea of what it would become or how it might actually function.

There were, however, many hopes, concerns, and fears (not to mention ambitions) that the prospect of its implementation aroused.

Hence, in fact, the efforts and aspirations to influence its emergence in some way and, above all, to determine its economic and social impact—and, consequently, its political significance.

These efforts and aspirations resulted in a vast body of corporatist literature and journalism, as well as a series of publishing, research, and debate initiatives that continued for several years and reached their peak at the Ferrara conference in May 1932, during which all the main positions came clearly to light, demonstrating, on the one hand, their fundamental irreconcilability, and on the other, the equally substantial wishful thinking behind the intentions of those who had hoped to influence government decisions, and, yet again, the absurdity of the claim to make corporatism a full-fledged economic system to be set against both the capitalist system (which people preferred to call "liberal") and the communist system.

This partly explains why, after the Ferrara conference and the lively wave of controversy that followed in the months immediately afterward, discussions on corporatism waned in both intensity and interest.

It should also be borne in mind that, following the Ferrara conference, the authorities also put a stop to the discussions; allowing them to continue would, in fact, have been counterproductive for the regime by that point: since the desired psychological and propaganda effect had already been achieved, letting the discussions continue would only have served to further highlight the irreconcilability of the positions and the regime's inability to embark on a clear path and follow it with genuine political will.

It is certainly no coincidence that when, between the fall of '33 and the spring of '34, corporatism was finally enacted, there was almost no trace left of the ferment of ideas from the previous years, and the executive branch's decisions took a very different course.

That said, it is certainly not possible here to examine in detail the various positions that emerged regarding corporatism between 1928–29 and 1932–33.

For the purposes of our discussion, it suffices to summarize the actual significance these positions hold today for those who, through them, wish to grasp the fundamental orientations of the Fascist ruling class regarding the basic economic and socio-political problems of Italy at that time.

A first position—certainly the one with the largest number of influential and prestigious supporters

(leaders from the economic and industrial sectors, legal experts, economists, high-ranking bureaucrats, etc.), was the one that conceived of corporatism narrowly as a primarily legal instrument aimed at making the resolution of labor relations increasingly effective and ensuring a better distribution of production—a position that accepted limited state intervention to rationalize production but categorically rejected any state control of the economy and any restriction on private initiative and, of course, on property.

According to the Hon. Gino Olivetti, secretary general of Confindustria and, along with Prof. Gino Arias, perhaps the most explicit and uncompromising advocate of this position, the corporatist system was, in fact, intended to strengthen and enhance both.

This restrictive and conservative conception of corporatism was countered by a wide range of proposals, ranging from the suggestion of individual "corporate" measures (a typical example being that of Prof. R. Benini, who, in Ferrara, argued for the need for "finance of an eminently corporate nature"—that is, a highly progressive tax reform) to the development of full-fledged "integral" corporate systems (all of which were more or less unfeasible even if they had enjoyed concrete political support), which were rooted in different cultural contexts and which, on closer inspection, essentially never managed to break free from an underlying logic that was either liberal or socialist in nature.

All these formulations, however, shared the common aim of giving corporatism a dynamic and catalytic role in fostering renewal with regard to the country's economic and social development.

From this perspective, their supporters—while not radically questioning the principle of private initiative—affirmed the need to impose social limits on it; furthermore, they advocated for increasingly active, concrete, and planned forms of state control and intervention in both the economy and production.

The camp of supporters of this type of corporatism was certainly the largest. Its ranks included many young people—often with confused and unrealistic ideas—but also old-guard fascists, intellectuals, technical experts, and bureaucrats, and even men such as Serpieri, De Stefani, Amoroso, and Benini—who were certainly not "revolutionaries" but who, each in their own field, believed that corporatism could be the tool to bring the Italian economy in line with the needs of a society now well on the path to modernization.

Expressions of this trend were, albeit with very different characteristics, four journals: "Critica fascista," which sought to reconcile the most vibrant and innovative corporatist demands with the personal political agenda of its editor, G. Bottai; *Lo Stato*, founded in 1930 and edited by E. Rosboch and C. Costamagna; *Il secolo fascista*, founded in 1931 and edited by G. Agnelli; and *Nuovi problemi di politica, storia ed economia*, founded in late 1930 and edited by N. Quilici and G. Colamarino.

Unlike the other three, this journal (which essentially operated within I. Balbo's sphere of influence) was, in a certain sense, the least political and the most scientific, and its corporatist discourse followed two main lines of thought: one more theoretical and economic (primarily thanks to the contributions of N. M. Fovel) and one more historical (primarily the work of its two editors).

In 1932, almost simultaneously with the Ferrara conference, its pages featured what we consider to be the most important historical-political attempt made during those years to situate and give meaning to corporatism within the context of the development of Italian society at the time: a lucid essay by

Colamarino on The Historical Nature of Italian Corporatism, in which he highlighted the only meaning that corporatism could truly have, Colamarino wrote, in fact:

The theorists and jurists of corporatism are the workers of the abstract—essentially neglected and held in low esteem by fascist society, even though they are not lacking in official status. They toil agonizingly to construct the doctrine of the corporative state on the plane of the absolute and the eternal. A particularly arduous and desperate undertaking…

The most persistent polemical theme in this literature—three-quarters of which consists of polemics and negation—is the anti-liberal one… What is true about this proposed antithesis? Certainly, from a formal standpoint, the corporatist state—in which the executive branch is essentially independent of and superior to the legislative branch, the party-state that dominates, coordinates, and guides all the forces of the country—has nothing to do with the liberal state in the traditional legal sense.

However, setting aside the jurists of the idealistic school—who, by equating the individual and the state in isolation, nullify this legal and institutional antithesis at its root and reconstruct a new liberal synthesis—the real issue raised by the supposed antithesis of corporatism and liberalism is another, and it is precisely historical.

To give the opposition between these two terms a positive meaning—one of certainty and even legal norm—it would be necessary to demonstrate that fascist corporatism—that is, our corporatism as it actually arose and developed in Italian society, and not the theoretical, abstract form of corporatism—paved its own path by fighting against liberalism and triumphed over it.

Fascism arose out of the crisis of Giolittism, triumphed over Giolittism's paralysis, and fully assumed the tasks of socialism within a political system hinged on an external mechanics of interests; and in doing so, it took on the function of synthesizing and harmonizing the forces that lay dormant or wandered in molecular disorder. It does not triumph over liberalism—of which Giolittism was the most deeply rooted negation—and which has never reigned in the customs and consciousness of Italians.

The Fascists had to contend only with the Socialists… And the conclusion is that the corporatism-liberalism dichotomy has no historical significance for Italian society… Corporatism, a typically Italian phenomenon, thrives on the conditions that gave rise to it, and is linked to the historical conditions we have briefly mentioned.

In the Fascist state, the issue of freedom is set aside and subordinated to the need for a relentless effort to accumulate material resources and technical tools, aimed at remedying the deficiencies of a nation born too late, one that cannot afford the luxury of squandering resources through civil unrest—which, in the absence of liberal traditions and customs, would prove fatal to it.

But in this arduous work—which is like a battle (all of fascism's undertakings are battles)—the fascist state, while compelled to impose an almost military discipline on its citizens, also feels the constant need for the support of the masses. Therefore, its motto is always to "reach out to the people."

The real problem of corporatism, under these conditions, lies in making the mission of the fascist state feel like a necessity that is both national and proletarian.

The third corporatist position that emerged during this period—that of Ugo Spirito and, more broadly, the group "Nuovi studi di diritto, economia e politica" (which was published starting in late 1927 under the direction of Spirito himself and A. Volpicelli)—can be considered, depending on one's perspective, either a development or an exaggeration of the previous one.

It had very few declared supporters; nevertheless, between 1930 and 1932, it was at the center of highly heated controversies that culminated, in Ferrara, in its disavowal by Bottai himself (who judged it "scientifically flawed, scientifically, in its conclusions, which do not mark a step forward in corporatism but a step away from corporatism"), even though he had previously shown himself to agree with some of Spirito's theses (and whose writings he continued to publish in *Critica fascista* even after the Ferrara conference), and in a series of fierce attacks labeling him a socialist and even a "communist."

According to Spirito, the facts demonstrated that in recent times "economic life is transforming at a rapid pace from individualistic and disorganized to collectivist and organic"; the growing role of the collective in social life, in turn, was increasingly exacerbating the dualism between the private and the public spheres, prompting the state to intervene ever more frequently to safeguard the interests of the collective by "nationalizing the losses of private companies." In this situation, "the private and the public, or the individual and the state, have become confused without truly merging and have ended up widening the gap between them."

Fascism had realized that the next step to take was to gradually eliminate these contradictions. Corporatism was a first step in this direction, but it could not stop where most people believed it should. If the first step was to eliminate the main class conflicts, the next step had to thoroughly address the problem of a "systematic center" that would resolve the relationship between business, unions, corporations, and the state.

And this, according to Spirito, could be resolved only through the owner-corporation and the corporate shareholders:

It is a solution that, at least on paper, resolves the contradictions mentioned above, unites capital and labor, eliminates the dualistic system, merges the company with the corporation, and finally allows for an effective identification of individual economic life with that of the state.

Indeed, if we imagine the transformation of a large joint-stock company into a corporation, we immediately perceive the radical change in all economic relationships and the possibility of achieving a truly harmonious system.

Capital passes from the shareholders to the workers, who become owners of the corporation in proportion to their respective hierarchical ranks: which means that the members of the corporation do not feel constrained, as in a trade union, by a need for self-defense that lies on the margins of economic life and spills over into political maneuvering, but are united by the bond of co-ownership, through which the corporation acquires the concreteness of an organism and full awareness of its own economic and political mission. The capitalist is no longer an outsider and is not unaware of how his property is managed, but manages it himself, thus coinciding with the figure of the worker; and the worker, on the other hand, becomes directly interested in the productivity of his labor insofar as it translates into an increase in the income from his capital. The figure of the entrepreneur, meanwhile, appears more on the periphery of capital and labor, yet—in the very definition of the terms and thus on the same level as the other members of the corporation—rises to the apex of the corporate hierarchy.

Finally, the state no longer needs to control or intervene from the outside, and is always present by the very fact that the corporation is one of its organs—an organ that is integrated into the national system through the National Council of Corporations. The state no longer intervenes as a conciliatory judge or as a rescue agency, but is the very reality of the corporation as it exists within the national system.

To these three conceptions of corporatism, we must finally add—in order to have a truly complete picture and to understand the subsequent developments in the attitude of certain sectors of fascist trade unionism toward corporatism—a fourth, which has generally been overlooked by those who have addressed the issue at hand: that of the trade unionists.

Although relatively scarce and sporadic, the evidence pertaining to this perspective is, on closer inspection, sufficient to identify its characteristic elements. The most evident and pronounced concern —partly because it was the most pressing at the time—was that corporatism might lead to a further hollowing out of the trade union, to new forms of control (and thus restraint) over its activities, and, in

the long run, even to the Ministry of Corporations taking over its functions.

In this regard, what E. Rossoni wrote in *Popolo d'Italia* on March 28, 1931, is significant:

Trade unionism must be carried out by the unions. It goes without saying. The representation of organized labor is the responsibility of the unions, not of the state's bureaucratic bodies. The state must not engage in trade unionism but must oversee trade union activities and propaganda.

The state must also ensure compliance with the letter and spirit of the law and ensure that the Labor Courts—an admirable institution that must not become obsolete but must instead become more agile and fully fulfill its important mission—operate under its supreme authority.

The same article also reveals that, for Rossoni, while corporatism could not claim to "undermine and shift the foundations of the capitalist economy," it must nevertheless avoid becoming "a mere bureaucratic tool for slamming the doors of the production site in the face of labor" and, on the contrary, constitute a "new production system," a "new economy."

And that this was not a personal position of Rossoni's but was shared by many veteran fascist trade unionists is demonstrated by the insistence with which, in those years, the trade unionist side advocated the need for corporatism to exercise effective control over production (in particular over its quantity, quality, and costs, the scope and operation of enterprises, and the formation and sources of capital)—and that the Corporations—if they were to become an "instrument for shaping our new economy rather than a bureaucratic body lacking any real capacity for action"—should organize not only occupational categories but also productive sectors.

As L. Razza wrote:

By establishing production Corporations, one does not, in fact, create a bureaucratic body—whether temporary or permanent—whose role is merely to offer opinions. Rather, a state body is established that deliberates. And, composed of representatives from all categories and groups with an interest in a specific branch of productive activity, it operates not with a view to short-term interests but toward the definitive resolution of the problems facing a specific branch of production.

This thus establishes a permanent framework that harnesses individual initiative—while also protecting it from the self-interest of competitors—in the collective interest of the country, including consumers.

Faced with this complex and contradictory tangle of hopes and fears, interests, aspirations, initial assessments, second thoughts, and moods that characterized the country's ruling class and the Fascist Party (we will discuss the masses and anti-Fascism later), what was Mussolini's attitude? What were his intentions as fascism prepared to reach the milestone of its first decade in power? Which path did the Duce intend to take, now that the regime had, for better or worse, firmly taken root in Italian society and he could look to the future without the burden of immediate concerns about the stability of his power?

Answering this question is not easy; both because, as we have already noted, it is extremely difficult to peer into the depths of Mussolini's personality, and because of the lack of truly reliable evidence—not because the evidence we do have is ever unreliable, but because, given Mussolini's character, his lack of genuine openness and trust toward anyone (with the sole exception of his brother, who, moreover, left no testimony beyond his correspondence with Benito—which is too sporadic to constitute a truly satisfactory source)—and his modus operandi, they all end up being more or less superficial and superficial, limited to documenting the "external" Mussolini—as he wished to appear far more than as he actually was; finally, because Mussolini's own statements are of little help, since they were all—on closer inspection—designed, on the one hand, to display the utmost confidence and the firmest resolve, and, on the other hand, to leave their author a very wide margin for maneuver and adaptation to developments in the situation.

What can be said with certainty is that Mussolini was well aware of the situation and understood its contradictions and negative aspects, as well as the concerns, disappointments, hopes, and expectations circulating throughout the country and among the ruling class.

Too many documents and numerous testimonies attest to this for there to be any doubt. Stating this, however, is not enough. To try to understand Mussolini's reactions, his behavior, and his actual governance during these years, one must first seek to establish his moral and psychological attitude toward the Italian reality of the time.

And to do so, it is necessary to take a broader view.

It is well known that political life, especially at the highest levels, is extremely all-consuming and demands dedication and sacrifice. Few statesmen, moreover, have devoted themselves to their work with the intensity and exclusivity of Mussolini, especially during the years that concern us here.

His private life was quite simple and modest, limited almost exclusively to his family, especially after they moved to Rome in mid-November 1929 and took up residence at Villa Torlonia on Via Nomentana. Although he was devoted to his family—to his wife (a good homemaker who remained essentially so throughout and who almost never interfered in high-level politics) and to his children (and in particular to his two daughters, Edda—because she was most like him in character and the most intelligent—and Anna Maria, especially after she was struck by polio at the age of seven and was on the verge of death), he spent very little time at home and lived in almost complete isolation.

Very few and rare visitors were admitted to Villa Torlonia (and to the Rocca delle Camminate in Predappio, and to Riccione, where Mussolini used to spend brief periods of rest): the Duce never felt the desire for a "salon," such as the one that, by contrast, gathered around Hitler and which Albert

Speer so vividly recalled in his memoirs; and, moreover, since he was very frugal when it came to food and, on top of that, after his serious illness in 1925, had been placed by his doctors on a very strict diet (he ate mainly fruit, vegetables, and very few starchy foods), not even lunchtimes offered him the opportunity to see anyone.

At home, Mussolini generally read, worked, or, more rarely, spent time with his children; sometimes he played tennis. Over time, he would develop the habit of having films screened for himself and his family in the evenings, though he almost never watched them all the way through—unless they were his favorites, particularly those starring Ridolini, Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, and Oliver Hardy.

Apart from a few brief morning horseback rides and, much more rarely, an evening at the theater, a few car rides, and a few short flights, he devoted almost all the time he did not spend at home to political activity—generally about ten hours a day, and sometimes even more.

In his work, Mussolini was orderly, methodical, and tireless; he rarely took even the briefest relaxing break. In 1925, he had written to D'Annunzio that he was the "national mule," burdened with many loads, and he made similar assessments of his own activities on other occasions as well.

And, in fact, his workload during these years was enormous and, in terms of sheer volume, sufficient to justify—for once—the glorification offered by Fascist propaganda. However—as we have already noted when discussing the early years of his government—this energy was largely misdirected and influenced by a mixture of mental states which, once the most difficult moments of those early years had passed, rather than dissipating, tended to become the norms of his governance: distrust, skepticism, lack of confidence in people—even in the overwhelming majority of his own collaborators—the conviction that he had to know and control everything personally, and confidence in his own "instinct" and influence over the masses.

Indeed, one could say that, as time went on, the negative aspects of his way of conceiving his duties as the supreme and indispensable leader of the regime—and of translating them into practical action—became more pronounced, resulting in an ever-greater waste of time and energy, an ever-greater political and psychological marginalization of his collaborators, and, consequently, an ever-greater centralization of every decision in his person and an ever-diminishing ability to adequately address the truly important issues, since they were presented to him mixed in with an infinite number of other, secondary matters—most of which were entirely absurd for a head of government; Consider that, following this downward spiral, by the regime's final days it had reached the point where—since everything had to be decided by the Duce—the chief of police would turn to him to request that, due to the inclement weather, Rome's subway workers be authorized to wear their winter uniforms before the date stipulated by regulation.

Although the party, the police, the Carabinieri, the OVRA, and the relevant ministries regularly—and often daily—informed him of everything happening in the country, staying up to date on everything and monitoring his sources of information, their "sensitivity" and efficiency were a constant source of anxiety for Mussolini. Another was ensuring that his orders were carried out promptly and to the letter. Yet another was making sure that nothing could play into the hands of the anti-fascists or discredit Italy and fascism abroad—or even simply present an image of them different from the one he intended: everything had to be disciplined, perfect, without a single misstep.

And these concerns shaped a significant portion of his activities. Driven by them, in fact, Mussolini devoted hours to reading an incredible number of reports, intelligence briefings, and above all, Italian

and foreign newspapers and magazines; he marked them up, annotated them, and took the necessary measures: he issued orders, sent reprimands (less often commendations), drafted press releases, clarifications, and denials, and requested further information or investigations; sometimes he drew inspiration from them for articles or editorials (usually anonymous) in *Popolo d'Italia*; more often, he passed his ideas on to some Roman fascist newspaper so that it could spin a polemic out of them (the chosen newspapers were generally *L'Impero* and, after its closure, *Roma fascista* or *Il Tevere*).

In short, for several hours a day, he served as his own press office. If we add to this the fact that he sometimes personally drafted press releases regarding certain audiences he granted or individual initiatives or events involving the government or the regime—and that any episode in his day (even something he had seen from his office window or while traveling by car) could provide him with an opportunity to speak out personally—we believe it should be clear just how scattered and self-centered his activities were.

Not to mention the quality of many of these statements, which were so trivial as to lack any justification and made it even more evident how absurd it was for the head of government to waste his time on them.

A few random examples will suffice to demonstrate this:

September 11, 1930 — To the Prefect of Milan

Tell Professor Francesco Coletti to include a footnote in his next article stating that the population of Italy as of May 31 of last year was 41,710,000, as reported in the August issue of the Monthly Statistical Bulletin, and not 41,340,000, as he stated in yesterday's article. This is to avoid misunderstandings and inaccuracies.

September 18, 1930 − To the Prefect of Milan

Please inform me whether it is true that the Podestà of Vimodrone, a certain Luigi Agnelli, has a son who is not registered in the ONB.

September 27, 1930 — To the Prefect of Terni

The coats of arms placed on the public housing units mentioned in my previous telegram are utterly ridiculous. They look like two one-cent stamps. Since Terni's creativity leaves much to be desired, take the fasces at the Campo Sportivo del Littorio as a model and place one to the right and one to the left of the main gates, along with the corresponding "Anno VIII E."

July 27, 1931 − To the Prefect of Milan

Issue an immediate seizure order against the Ambrosiano newspaper solely on the basis of the article titled "The Most Holy Camorra." The word "camorra" has a specific, definitive, deplorable, and nefarious traditional meaning in the Italian language, which has since become a cliché throughout the world—a cliché of mockery and defamation of Italians. Circulating it in Italy is a mistake, an act of stupidity, and a blow to the nation's moral prestige. It is also time to put an end to the debate on the 20th century, which anti-fascists across the border are already exploiting.

February 10, 1932 — To the Prefect of Genoa

Tell that harmless slowpoke Giovanni Macaggi that I have read his account of the Roman Republic in the *Il Lavoro* column and that it is quite good, except for the omission of one small detail—namely, that the bullet that killed Goffredo Mameli was republican, most republican indeed, because it was cast in the Gallic lead of the immortal princes.

May 6, 1932 − To the Prefect of Turin

Tell the editor of the *Gazzetta del Popolo* that the interview with the former Kaiser is simply idiotic and that, as far as I'm concerned, I have no desire whatsoever for that gentleman's praise. Tell the Honorable Amicucci—tell him verbatim—to rein in the newspaper, which is already sliding into daily tedium on many of its pages.

April 17, 1933 — To the prefects of Pisa, Lucca, and Massa

Highly reliable eyewitnesses inform me that there has been a dramatic resurgence of begging, especially by children. Cars—including foreign ones—stopped at railroad crossings are besieged by hordes of children. The comments this provokes are easy to imagine. I demand that this begging be cracked down on. If the G.O.A. is not functioning or no longer has the resources, please inform me.

Examining Mussolini's activities during this period gives the impression that, proportionally speaking, his commitment—both in terms of quantity and intensity—to actual political affairs was almost lesser, and above all that it was applied to and exhausted almost entirely in day-to-day administration, in dealing with the problems that arose on a daily basis.

It is particularly striking that—apart from specific, more strictly technical sectors, such as public works and agricultural policy—there is rarely any documented effort to formulate a political strategy with a long-term perspective and objectives that are not merely short-term; that in the few rare cases where the intention to achieve genuine reform—not driven by immediate needs—is evident, but rather in pursuit of a specific political objective, is almost always eventually abandoned, without it being possible to fully grasp the reasons behind it; and that, finally, almost all political initiatives of any significance appear to have been taken almost suddenly, without adequate preparation, almost as the result of sudden decisions, often made possible by contingent circumstances.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude from what we have said so far that Mussolini, despite being well aware of the Italian situation, did not know how to manage it, limited himself essentially to day-to-day administration, and even lacked a fundamental political vision.

The limitations and flaws we have discussed were certainly real and had a whole series of very specific negative consequences, which were already being felt heavily and would be felt even more as the years went by. To attribute them solely to his character, his lack of preparation, his lack of a solid education, or the absence of a true guiding moral principle would, however, be simplistic and, ultimately, incorrect.

All the more so because, upon closer examination, these alleged causes do not appear—whether considered individually or as a whole—to be as decisive as they have seemed to some. Despite all its flaws, Mussolini's character was still rooted in a solid peasant background—petty, if you will, but far removed from the cold fanaticism and fierce determination of a Hitler, a Stalin, or, in other respects, a Churchill.

As for his lack of preparation, the entire argument so often made about it in anti-fascist literature must, in our view, be put into perspective: in nearly ten years in power, Mussolini had by then acquired a certain level of competence; and in any case, while not underestimating Mussolini's personalistic style,

in a modern state, political acumen matters far more than specific expertise at the decision-making level—and Mussolini certainly had not lost that.

As for culture—another favorite topic of anti-Mussolini journalism and anecdotal accounts—while it is undisputed that Mussolini was not a man of systematic and organized study, nor was he critically astute, but rather a self-taught man and, moreover, tied to certain cultural models that were by then often outdated—he was nonetheless a man of vast (albeit disorganized) reading and remarkable intellectual curiosity, who harbored a sort of inferiority complex regarding culture.

Here too, therefore, as an "intellectual," he stood several notches above not only a Hitler or a Stalin, but also various pragmatic democratic politicians of his time.

From this particular perspective, those who—by virtue of their professional sensibilities—probably judged Mussolini most accurately were the great special correspondents and journalists of the time, who had the opportunity to make a direct comparison between him and his contemporary political leaders. Think of Ludwig, Ward Price, or Günther. One final and most delicate issue: the absence of a true guiding moral principle. That Mussolini lacked such a principle is, from a historical standpoint, beyond dispute; moreover, we have already had occasion to highlight this point in one of our previous volumes. However, when reconstructing Mussolini's personality and legacy, it would be wrong—or at least incomplete—to limit ourselves to this observation alone.

Today, from a historical perspective, we can and must reach this conclusion; however, if we truly wish to understand Mussolini the man and the politician, we cannot ignore or fail to give due consideration to the fact that Mussolini did possess a moral code—even if we judge it negatively—and, indeed, it was very strong and active within him.

One might even say that unless one realizes this and takes it into due consideration, it is impossible to truly understand Mussolini the man or—more importantly—his politics.

Highly active and vigilant on a strictly personal level, Mussolini's moral code also possessed a series of very specific characteristics and motivations on the political level. As we saw in the previous volume, by 1927–28 Mussolini's political outlook had undergone a profound transformation, shifting from an extremely dynamic tactical approach focused on the short—very short—term to a strategy focused on the long—very long—term, rooted in a whole series of objective and subjective, psychological, and, in their own way, realistic motives; critical—pessimistically critical—of Italians and, in his view, of their tendency to "vegetate" and fail to grasp the great opportunity that fascism offered them to "redeem" themselves and finally become a great, "mature" nation; and, at the same time, self-critical toward fascism—which was itself fundamentally inadequate for its tasks—and toward the regime, which had reached a state of stalemate and stagnation from which—barring events that were unforeseeable at the time—it could not emerge for a long time, unless it was willing to risk a crisis that might bring about its transformation but also its dissolution.

In practice, Mussolini had shifted the focus of his political agenda from the present to the future: having failed to make a profound impact on the Italians of today, he had set his sights on those of tomorrow—the new generations—convinced that he could mold them according to his wishes and thus enable them to bring about in the future that "true" Fascist Italy which he realized he had failed to create and could no longer truly succeed in creating.

There is no need to emphasize just how absurd, unnatural, and—in particular—culturally naive such a

“political” perspective was, and how alien it was to any notion of the masses’ capacity for human judgment and self-awareness. It cannot be denied, however, that at its root lay a moral idea—a moral idea that we cannot endorse, but upon which—at least during this period—Mussolini based his actions within a framework that was not strictly nationalistic (that is, one that actively subjugated other peoples) and even less racist, but—as we shall see—spiritualistic in its own way and which—even if Mussolini’s egocentrism cannot be underestimated—found a certain “dignity” in the fact of projecting itself into a future in which its creator would no longer be there to reap any potential rewards.

To fully understand and evaluate this “moral idea” and the political perspectives that followed from it, we must pause for a moment to examine what Mussolini’s intellectual stance was during this period and which cultural influences had the most pronounced effect on him.

All the more so because, if one can speak of a “cultural moment” in Mussolini’s personality, it was certainly this one, between the late 1920s and the mid-1930s: both because this was the period in which the Duce most clearly displayed his desire to present himself as—and to be regarded as—an intellectual, and because it was during this same period that his cultural formation was practically complete—that is, it acquired its essential and, from then on, fundamentally defining characteristics.

That Mussolini presented himself as a man of culture is well known and can be documented in various ways. Significant examples include, for instance, not only certain passages from his speeches but also some critical commentaries—generally private in nature, though occasionally made public. Among the latter, one might mention his review of Ardengo Soffici’s *Elegia dell’Ambra* (January 1927) and his letter on the Platonic dialogues to Prof. Giuseppe Modugno (June 1927). As for those that, on the other hand, remained unpublished for the time being, not only are they perhaps the most significant, but they clearly demonstrate how Mussolini sought to take a stance on all kinds of issues—from historical ones—more directly linked to matters of political judgment—to literary, artistic, and philosophical ones.

One of them—a telegram dated December 27, 1930, to Ada Negri after reading *Vespertina*—was recently made public by S. Comes, who highlighted its “ability to readily discern the origins of ideas, images, and voices.”

Among others, we will mention just two very typical letters, one to Gentile and one to Pastonchi. The first, dated August 31, 1931, read:

Dear Gentile,

I want to tell you that in recent days, on the secluded beach of Castel Porziano, I read your book *La filosofia dell’arte* with great interest from cover to cover. And while I don’t want anyone to say that your conception of Art is “definitive,” it does open up new horizons, sets out major “guiding principles” for further research, and offers a solution to this fascinating and eternally relevant problem.

I would like to see the book—once translated—become more widely known in scholarly circles.

And the second, written more than three years later, on December 26, 1934, regarding a tragedy by Pastonchi:

Dear Pastonchi,

In the propitious, nocturnal silence of Villa Torlonia, I read your tragedy: I read it calmly, lingering over every page, and at times over a single line.

From a literary standpoint, the tragedy is beautiful; its plot is gripping: the dialogue, the choruses, and the movement of the masses are such as to arouse the audience's interest and attention. They even move the audience.

At the heart of the drama lies an antithesis: Simma-Brea; black-white; master-disciple; past-future; aristocracy-masses; this antithesis culminates in the ruin of time. From a theatrical standpoint (you wrote this tragedy for the stage, not to confine it to the pages of a book), there is a danger, and that is the "poetic" form of the work.

The actors will end up singing, as if it were an opera, lacking only a bit of orchestration. They will sing. There is a risk of tiring the audience. Your tragedy should be "translated" into prose: I mean a dry, linear, unadorned prose, such as that of the builders, architects, and craftsmen of Pontia.

And now a few observations. That Batiello whom you call an "emporio owner" is, all things considered, nothing more than a shopkeeper; and for a shopkeeper (even if a former athlete), he speaks too grandly, going so far as to say "greater than his great master."

Even his squabbles with Cecia are "shopkeeper-like" to the extreme. On page 26, I don't like that you describe "victory as a beast with a long tail of nostalgia leading back to its lair." Think about it, and you'll find that the image isn't beautiful. On page 119, you speak of life as "a feast laid out with many dishes." This, too, is not beautiful. If I were you, on page 121 I would remove those "ferocious faces," which might remind the malicious (who are never in short supply) of the "ferocious faces" of the Bourbon era.

Someone might observe that the lines on page 122, in which you say that “a created thing is a sacred silence to which one always returns,” are too vague. On page 10, I would remove these two lines, which are unworthy of your Muse: “Before us, dazzling and leading us—Victorious is an angel of light.” On page 165, the two lines “A slight fever, and—lo and behold—you’re a mouse in a trap” do not measure up to the others that precede and follow them in that scene of intense pathos. Other minor observations could be made here and there, but alongside these points, there are many beautiful and fresh images.

I am sure that with further readings you will refine the text even further (Caresse votre phrase: elle finira pour vous sourire—A. France).

Another issue of the utmost importance, given the nature of the tragedy: the staging.

Conclusion: Find a theater company, and I will help ensure the play is staged next April in Rome, at the Argentina Theater.

And now, before bidding you a very cordial farewell, I ask you not to take me too literally as a literary or theatrical critic, whichever you prefer.

Perhaps the most significant testimony, however, is that offered by the following letter to Emilio Bodrero dated January 8, 1928:

Dear Bodrero,

I have read your study and am returning it to you. It is interesting and, at its core, true to reality. One might add that my education is not general or, worse, generic: rather, it is systematic in every respect. Precisely because education serves me—I do not serve it. A means, not an end. A weapon, not an ornament. One could also say that I have a soft spot for philosophy and, more precisely, for the history of philosophy.

See, for example, a recent letter on the three Platonic dialogues: Euthyphro, Crito, and Phaedo. But, in the end, you've hit the nail on the head. Thank you.

In addition to these critical remarks, Mussolini's desire to present himself as a man of culture is clearly evident in many other instances.

For example, from a certain tendency to present himself as "liberal" toward men of culture (Paul Valéry understood this aspect of his personality well; in late 1927, when appealing to him on behalf of an Italian relative imprisoned for political reasons, Valéry did not fail to appropriately play on this chord: "Poets are meant to ask for mercy; and the great leaders of nations are destined to alleviate human suffering")—and not only toward those who were active in fascism, who could enhance Italy's prestige abroad, or who flattered his vanity, but also toward some who held anti-fascist views.

In this light, we believe we should view some of his stances, such as the one in June 1929, when—at the urging of Emma Gramatica—he warned the Neapolitan fascists and press not to cause incidents on the occasion of the premiere of Roberto Bracco's *I Pazzi*; his decision, in February of the following year, to order that G. A. Borgese be allowed to resume his lectures at the University of Milan, in the aftermath of the incidents and acts of violence staged—and still threatened—by local fascists; and, furthermore, his inclination (despite indignant pressure from former nationalist circles) not to dramatize the incident that had occurred on May 14, 1931, in Bologna, stemming from Toscanini's refusal to begin a concert with the national anthems (namely, *Giovinezza*).

Nor, from this perspective, do we believe one can underestimate the cultural character that Mussolini was keen to impart during this period to his relationships—both in person and through correspondence—with cultural figures such as D'Annunzio and, on another level, Ada Negri.

Also during this period, however, the most significant event was the artistic collaboration that linked Mussolini to Giovacchino Forzano (whom he had met through D'Annunzio) and from which, between 1929 and 1931, two historical dramas emerged—*Campo di maggio* and *Villafranca*—and later a third, *Cesare*; These three plays enjoyed a certain degree of success—albeit largely out of curiosity—even abroad, where they were staged as works by Forzano and Mussolini, while in Italy the Duce did not want his name to appear officially; two films were also adapted from the first two.

Apart from minor revisions, the three scripts were entirely the work of Forzano; the ideas and essential elements of the plots, however, came from Mussolini, who drew inspiration for the first from E. Ludwig's *Napoleon* and for the second from G. Massari's *Diary*.

A detailed examination of these plays might offer some points of interest, both from a general psychological perspective and, more specifically, with regard to their central themes: three great political figures—Napoleon, Cavour, and Julius Caesar—viewed at the decisive moment of their lives and, in essence, of their defeat at the hands of misunderstanding and betrayal.

Here, however, it seems to us that the three plays should be viewed above all as a precise testimony to

the “cultural moment” Mussolini was experiencing and as a first step toward grasping its essence.

There is no doubt, in fact, that—beyond the question, psychologically interesting but historically of little significance, of whether they can be understood as symptoms of an unconscious conviction that he would be betrayed by his loyal followers and would have to succumb politically at the hands of the monarchy—the three historical dramas, the result of the artistic collaboration between Mussolini and Forzano, reveal quite clearly Mussolini’s tendency to project his own figure and his own actions into a “historical” perspective—that of the “lonely” man, aware that he was pursuing a great goal but had to do so amid the incomprehension and moral inadequacy of those around him who were supposed to assist him, and, moreover, aware that he had to act by exploiting and seizing every opportunity, in a sort of race even more dramatic than the race against death: the race against “time.”

And with this we have arrived at the second—and most important—point of our discussion: that concerning Mussolini’s cultural formation, as it was essentially taking shape during this period, and its essential and most characteristic features—namely, those that had and would most significantly influence his political actions.

We have already had occasion to dwell on some of the main components of Mussolini’s culture—especially the oldest ones, which had their roots in his formative years or in the war and postwar years—in previous volumes. It is therefore unnecessary to revisit them here; a brief mention will suffice.

To summarize as much as possible, it can be said that Mussolini’s culture rested on three main constituent elements: a basic form of positivism, a neo-idealist voluntarism with strong pragmatic overtones, and an absolute relativism, upon which—in turn—various specific ideas drawn from the works of authors such as Nietzsche (regarding the function of personality and its creative power, as well as the concept of civilization), Sorel, Pareto, and Renan (the Renan of *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques*, who had renounced his youthful democratic ideas and rejected the industrial and egalitarian character that modern society had assumed), Le Bon, as well as certain historians such as Michelet and Carlyle (often “interpreted” through a Carduccian lens).

Between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, several other influences were added to these main ones, echoes of which can be detected here and there in Mussolini’s writings and speeches of the time. Generally sparked by the occasional reading, in the vast majority of cases, however, they almost never truly became part of Mussolini’s cultural heritage and, after a brief moment of popularity, eventually lost their bite; thus, it is pointless to dwell on them here.

To fully assess the actual significance of these occasional influences, it suffices to say that in the early 1930s, Mussolini—driven by his voracious intellectual curiosity and, perhaps, a desire to play a small prank on the Vatican—took a very brief interest in the activities of the *Rivista italiana di psicoanalisi*, only to go on, shortly thereafter, to define psychoanalysis as a “brand-new sham” and to make no serious effort to counter the ecclesiastical maneuvers that led to the suspension of the journal’s publication.

However, two other components—one that had already taken shape in the mid-1920s, the other during this very period—cannot be overlooked at all, since, albeit to varying degrees, they constituted the final and, in a certain sense, decisive enrichment of Mussolini’s cultural formation in his mature years and had—especially the second—a decisive influence on his politics.

The first and best-known of these two components was the Gentilian one.

The deep-seated cultural and ideological reasons for Giovanni Gentile's adherence to Fascism and his substantial loyalty to it until his death—despite the disappointments and setbacks suffered by the Sicilian philosopher—have been lucidly clarified by A. Del Noce. Mussolini's Gentilianism, on the other hand, has not only not been truly explored to this day, but there have even been those who have drastically denied its existence.

In this regard, the most typical and, at the same time, most recent position is that of Giudice, who—speaking of the first part of the entry "Doctrine of Fascism" in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* edited by Gentile—defined it as a "paper ornament" of Mussolini's dictatorship and even portrayed Gentile as "a sort of court metaphysician."

In reality, especially during the period that concerns us here, Gentilianism was undoubtedly an important and authentic component of Mussolini's culture. To deny this is absurd; at best, it is a mechanical application of Croce's famous quip that Fascism was an "onacocracy," but, more likely, it is one of the fruits of that posthumous, conformist, and mannered anti-Mussolinism of so many intellectuals—regarding whom, quite rightly, R. Mazzetti has rightly written that "anti-fascist conformism has the same nature, the same charge of impersonality, inauthenticity, moral and intellectual equivocation, of a fundamental self-deception, and of fundamental hypocrisy as fascist conformism did."

That Mussolini was influenced by certain key tenets of Gentilianism and, in his own way, adhered to them is undeniable. Moreover, if one denies this, one can no longer understand why Mussolini—careful as he was never to confine himself to positions or rigid frameworks that might limit his room for maneuver and even, if it served his purposes, to assert the opposite of what he had previously stated—chose, by allowing Gentile to draft the first part of the entry "Doctrine of Fascism" (the "Fundamental Ideas") and by essentially endorsing its underlying framework in the second part (the one devoted to "Political and Social Doctrine"), which he himself drafted and signed along with the first, commit so unequivocally to a position that, on the one hand, contradicted his oft-repeated assertion that Fascism had not consciously sought to confine itself to a doctrinal system and that, on the other hand, was known to be opposed both by the Church (which had long been at odds with Gentile's positions; not coincidentally, it expressed concern over certain statements in the Doctrine of Fascism and would even place Gentile's complete works on the Index in 1934) and by broad sectors of Fascism itself.

On closer inspection, the Doctrine of Fascism—both in the section drafted by Gentile and in that written by Mussolini, the latter serving as a sort of historical-autobiographical commentary on the former that is essentially faithful to it, as well as a translation into more immediately political and social terms—clearly shows what the Duce had accepted from Gentile's thought: the condemnation—not only in political-practical terms but also in doctrinal terms—of classical liberalism, socialism, and democracy; the conception of the "ethical state" and, therefore, of the nation as an expression, indeed, as the creation of the State; the idea that fascism, as a religious and historical conception, was not "merely a lawgiver and founder of institutions, but an educator and promoter of spiritual life," capable of "remaking man" right down to his character.

And if we broaden the discussion even further, it seems we can say that while Mussolini undoubtedly adhered to those aspects of Gentile's conception that best suited his idea of the regime's "historical function," he adhered above all to its general spirit, to the "philosophy of life" it expressed. G. Melhis had already recognized this in 1928 when he wrote:

And so the relationship between Mussolini's political action and Giovanni Gentile's philosophy of the act is certainly no coincidence. Gentile, drawing on Fichte's theory, placed the act at the center of knowledge. Inaction is the greatest attribute of the spirit. Ideas and values do not remain isolated from life, but can be integrated into life through our actions. Idleness and passivity keep us distant from essential values, and, consequently, from reality and true life.

Action and all creation are part of true spiritual life.

Ideal value, reality, and life are brought into the closest possible relationship by the concept of activity. I have value to the extent that I act; or—to put it another way—my reality is expressed only through action. Life lies not in dreams, speculation, contemplating things, or representing them to ourselves, but in resolute action. The accomplishment of an action and a work stemming from a righteous will—this radiating of energy into social life—is not merely a criterion for knowing reality, but reality itself. One does not merely say, "I act, therefore I am," but rather: "My reality resides in the action itself."

Such philosophical theories, as can be seen, encroach upon the realm of practical activity: I live my true life to the extent that I express it in the present. Above all, one must not let the opportune moment slip away and must always be able to assert one's individuality in social life. The past is no more; the future is not yet. In the deeply felt present lies the reality and meaning of life.

While for the Gentilian component one can cite a whole series of references—including highly significant and authoritative ones, first and foremost to *The Doctrine of Fascism*—the situation is more difficult when it comes to the other component of Mussolini's culture during this period, the one we might define as Spenglerian.

This is true both because Oswald Spengler's influence on Mussolini has never been truly taken into account, and because Mussolini's explicit references to the author of *The Decline of the West* are relatively scarce, and, finally, because the Duce's attitude toward Spengler's theses was not one of mere adherence, but of acceptance and, at the same time, rejection: acceptance of the general framework, but rejection of the prophetic conclusion with which Spengler entrusted to the German people (as the least worn down, the last to have matured among the white peoples) the historic mission of exercising its unifying function over the Western world and establishing a new "empire," which would represent the final stage of Western Zivilisation until it, too, were destroyed by new "virgin" peoples capable of expressing a new Kultur.

It is impossible to say precisely when Mussolini first came into contact with Spengler's thought. Since there is no explicit reference to Spengler in his writings, speeches, or papers prior to this period—and

we do not believe there is even the slightest trace of influence from Spengler's works—we are inclined to believe that Mussolini's "discovery" of the German writer must date back to the second half of the 1920s, perhaps to 1925, when Spengler sent him a complimentary copy of his politically relevant writings, or—more likely—to 1927–28, when V. Beonio Brocchieri published his studies on Spengler and extensively expounded the main theses of *The Decline of the West*, at a time when the theme of Europe's "crisis" had also become fashionable in Italy and the works of H. Massis, R. Guénon, and others—in addition to those of Spengler—began to be discussed. At least three facts confirm this belief: that in the second half of 1928 the Italian translation of R. Korherr's *The Decline in Birth Rates: The Death of Nations* was published with dual prefaces by Mussolini and Spengler; that by the end of the 1920s Mussolini began making references that might suggest a familiarity (whether direct or indirect—through the French translation of *The Decline of the West* or solely through Beonio Brocchieri—cannot be determined) of Spengler's theories; and that during this period, the Fascist press began to draw certain connections between some of Mussolini's statements on the problem of the West and Spengler's theories.

In fact, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider one of these early connections, since, while on the one hand it is one of the least explicit and least favorable to the German writer, on the other hand it inadvertently highlights one of the main reasons why Spengler must have seemed culturally "familiar" to Mussolini—and thus easily incorporated into his cultural heritage.

As the author of the article in question, the future ethnologist Ernesto De Martino, wrote:

Nietzsche's Übermensch—which finds its counterpart in Ernest Renan's vision of a sort of "super-planet" where the experience that failed on Earth would be realized—Nietzsche's Übermensch betrays a dissatisfaction with the achievements of Western civilization; the apocalyptic mindset of Nietzsche, like that of Renan, is the prelude to the prophetic vision of Oswald Spengler, who has unabashedly and brazenly planted himself right in the midst of European culture.

By the 1930s, Spenglerian influences had become numerous and evident in Mussolini's thought, even though explicit references to Spengler remained extremely rare; this, however, is easily explained by the fact that, since Spengler was known above all as an advocate of the "historical mission" of the German people (as well as for his sympathies toward National Socialism), Mussolini could not risk any misunderstandings.

It is extremely significant that, even so, when Spengler published *Jahre der Entscheidung* in 1933, Mussolini not only insisted that it be translated into Italian but—albeit without signing it—dedicated an extremely favorable article to it in *Popolo d'Italia*. Indeed, this twofold decision is, in a certain sense, an indication of which of the many points in Spengler's theory had most impressed Mussolini.

There were numerous aspects of Spengler's theory that could have found favor with Mussolini. First of all—accustomed as he was to a certain Sorel (the author of the polemic against the illusions of progress) and a certain Pareto—he must have found Spengler's general cyclical-naturalistic conception of civilization and history tout court to be congenial, a conception that led him to theorize a history of

humanity divided into distinct cycles, each corresponding to a unique and unrepeatable civilization.

It is no coincidence that the idea of the historical “cycle” is so frequent in Mussolini’s thought; and it refers not only to various peoples and their hegemonic roles—which might lead one to think of it merely as a dialectical-propagandistic device (France, England, and even Germany at a certain period, which have now exhausted their cycles, and Italy, on the other hand, which is only just beginning its own)—but to fascism itself.

And, moving from the general to the particular, theses such as those on the moral superiority of the countryside over the city, on the sterility of the man “of civilization” (that is, in practice, of the city), and on its ruinous consequences for the “destinies” of peoples— on the value and ethical function of a conscious conception of “race”—not understood, moreover, in materialistic-Darwinian terms, but in psychic-spiritualistic terms, as a sort of “conscious technique of communication” founded on a shared sentiment regarding certain “signs” and certain “values.”

It is no coincidence that, in the anonymous article in *Popolo d’Italia*, Mussolini identified this conception of “race” as one of the notable aspects of Spengler’s thought and, with a clear reference to the National Socialists, emphasized that “Spengler wishes to clearly distinguish his point of view from the vulgar, Darwinian, or materialistic one that is currently in vogue among the anti-Semites of Europe and America”.

Nor—once again—could Mussolini’s pessimism and crass Machiavellianism fail to take pleasure in finding in the author of *The Decline of the West* confirmation—indeed, a theoretical foundation—for the historical validity of an unscrupulous policy of pure power: “History has always sacrificed truth and justice to power and race, condemning to death those men and peoples for whom truth was more important than action and justice more essential than power.”

All these points of Spengler’s theory, however, constituted nothing more than parallels—certainly significant ones, but still only parallels; with respect to Mussolini’s worldview, they did not represent new contributions; at most, they could serve as confirmations of certain convictions of his and enrich them with new arguments.

The true contribution, most characteristic of Spengler’s discovery, lay elsewhere, and we find confirmation of this—as already mentioned—in the keen interest that reading *Jahre der Entscheidung* aroused in Mussolini. This work certainly occupies a far less important place in Spengler’s body of work than *The Decline of the West* and adds virtually nothing to the conception outlined in that text; yet, compared to it, had the great merit for Mussolini—in addition to being much easier and more immediate to read and understand—of bringing Spengler’s concept, his historical theory of “Caesarism,” into sharper relief, and of doing so in a context that was less theoretical and general, more topical, and with direct reference to Mussolini himself.

According to Spengler’s cyclical system, “Caesarism” would be the final stage of the “civilization” phase—the ultimate struggle of “Caesarian individuals,” or heroes, to stem the decline of their civilization. When a “civilization”—with the false splendor of cosmopolitan cities in which the final and supreme triumph of the spirit, of theories, of technology, and of money is celebrated—has reached its most artificial and refined point, inevitably—according to Spengler— “reality, having broken free from ideas, reappears naked and gigantic,” and “the eternal cosmic rhythm definitively overcomes the spiritual tensions of several centuries.”

It is at this point that, in opposition to money—which, after destroying the ancient orders of "civilization," had triumphed "in the form of democracy"—men of Caesar-like stature emerged: "they shatter the omnipotence of money," put an end to politics determined by the spirit and by money—that is, to democracy—and realize their "purely political" will: The advent of Caesarism will shatter the dictatorship of money and its political weapon, democracy. After a long triumph of the cosmopolitan economy and its interests over the creative political force, the political aspect of life will prove, despite everything, to be the strongest. The sword will triumph over money; the will of the lord will once again subdue the predatory will.

This is the general picture. Specifically, for Spengler—both in *The Decline of the West* and, even more clearly, in *Years of Decision*—everything justified the assertion that the West was now on the threshold of its Caesarian age. Among other things, it demonstrated two facts: that the era of theories and grand systems (liberalism and socialism) was now drawing to a close, and that the political party, as a political form, was disappearing.

It is easy to imagine the fascination that such a theoretical prophecy must have held for Mussolini; indeed, in his writings and speeches from this period, it is not difficult to find statements that clearly echo virtually all the most typical arguments of Spengler's polemic against mass democratic society—and in particular, the theory of Caesarism.

Among the many examples that could be cited, we will limit ourselves to just three, though they are highly significant.

The first is the extensive reference to the crisis of Western society contained in the article "Decidersi!," which appeared anonymously in *Popolo d'Italia* on January 12, 1932:

Ears accustomed to perceiving not only the roar of storms but also the muffled sounds of subterranean grinding, hear that something is creaking; that many bonds have loosened; that certain traditional and fundamental principles—respect for life, the home, and the property of others—are crumbling; that the challenge of tomorrow leads to the espousal of *carpe diem*, and despair spills over, on the one hand, into avarice and, on the other, into dissipation. If you add to these other symptoms that recall, with a more than striking analogy, what happened during the periods of decline of other civilizations—symptoms ranging, for example, from the brutality and frequency of certain crimes to the stupidity of certain competitions— you will realize that not only is a specific aspect of our civilization at stake, but that the entire civilization of the white race may disintegrate, weaken, and fade into aimless disorder and misery with no future.

The second case, on the other hand, refers more specifically to the concept of the transition from one civilization to another and is also contained in an article—this time signed—that appeared in *Popolo d'Italia* (August 22, 1933) and in various U.S. newspapers, with the telling title *Between Two Civilizations*. In this article, speaking of the movement of ideas "that the Fascist revolution has brought about during these first eleven years of its history," Mussolini wrote:

We have fully entered a period that can be called a transition from one type of civilization to another. The ideologies of the nineteenth century are crumbling and find no defenders.

As for the third, it consists of another anonymous article written for *Il Popolo d'Italia* (July 6, 1933) on the occasion of the unveiling along Via dell'Impero in Rome of a replica of the famous statue of Julius Caesar housed in Rimini; an article in which, among other things, we find this truly revealing statement:

This, too, is an era that can be called "Caesarian," dominated as it is by exceptional personalities who embody the powers of the state for the good of the people, against parliaments—just as Caesar marched against the senatorial oligarchy of Rome, without falling into the excesses of Marius's demagoguery.

In a certain sense, one could even argue that it was precisely thanks to Spengler's concept of "Caesarism" that the various psychological and cultural elements contributing to the "moral idea" that animated Mussolini's politics during those years found their binding force; just as it is highly probable (and it is significant that this is confirmed by evidence regarding the period in which a certain theme became more prominent and even insistent in Mussolini's thinking) that Spengler's concept of "Caesarism" also contributed to some extent to heightening—to the point of exaggeration—Mussolini's exaltation of Roman identity and of Rome's role as the world's champion of a new civilization (which, not coincidentally, was never that of the Republic, but rather that of the Caesarian and Augustan eras).

And if one were so inclined, one might perhaps go so far as to ask—at least hypothetically—whether Spengler's portrayal of Julius Caesar had any influence on Mussolini's behavior, on his approach to domestic political affairs.

According to Spengler, Mommsen completely fails to grasp the spirit of the times in his acute analysis of the "diarchy" created by Augustus and the associated division of powers between the Princeps and the Senate. A century earlier, this constitution would have been a reality, but precisely for that reason it had not even crossed the minds of the despotic figures of that era.

Now it meant nothing more than an attempt by weak personalities who, resorting to mere formalities, sought to create illusions around invocable facts. Caesar recognized things as they were, set aside all sentimentality, and founded his rule on concrete principles.

The legislation enacted in the final days of his life consisted exclusively of provisions none of which were intended to have any real lasting effect. This is precisely what has always been overlooked.

Caesar knew matters too well to presume to foresee, at that moment—on the eve of the expedition against the Parthians—the developments to come in their definitive forms. Based on what we have been saying about Mussolini's culture and the main influences that by then characterized it, it is now finally possible to attempt to define concretely what the "moral idea" was upon which Mussolini essentially based his political action during this period.

Such a definition can be arrived at only by following two parallel yet converging paths. In general terms, it must be deduced from what we have said so far; in specific terms—that is, in its concrete form—it must be derived from what Mussolini himself was doing, writing, and saying on the most varied occasions and in the most diverse circumstances, including those that might seem less relevant.

In this regard, it is our conviction that we should not limit ourselves to drawing solely on Mussolini's published and unpublished writings and his official speeches, but should also draw on his private writings—and among these, first and foremost, Emil Ludwig's *Conversations with Mussolini*. In fact, we are convinced that *Conversations with Mussolini* is, in this regard, an important and essentially reliable source, even though more than a few—among both fascists and antifascists—have denied this.

The *Colloqui*, as is well known, were published in Italy by Mondadori at the beginning of the second half of 1932, in a print run that was undoubtedly substantial for the time (twenty thousand copies), and almost simultaneously in Austria (the German edition, in fact, came out slightly before the Italian one), France, and the United States.

Ludwig, one of the leading and best-known journalists of the time, had drawn a parallel between Mussolini and Napoleon in 1928 in the *Telegraf*; the following year, in March, he conducted his first interview with the Duce. Later, after interviewing Stalin and while he was compiling his conversations with the Bolshevik dictator into a book, he decided to write a new volume—to serve as a counterpart to it—on the Fascist dictator. This led to a request for a series of meetings with Mussolini, which took place almost daily from March 23 to April 4, 1932, and following which Ludwig wrote *Conversations with Mussolini* in German within a couple of weeks.

The text was immediately submitted to Mussolini, who made minor and essentially insignificant changes: he deleted a few sentences and changed eighteen words. While the book was in press, however, Mussolini was seized by some qualms, and if he had been able to block the foreign editions, he would most likely have prevented the book from being published in Italy. In the end, however, he had to resign himself to it, even though he warned the publisher not to reprint it, citing as an excuse the poor Italian into which, in his view, it had been translated. From Forlì on June 30, 1932, he telegraphed the prefect of Milan:

Please warn—indeed, formally instruct—the publisher Mondadori not to reprint, once the first edition is sold out, a single copy of Ludwig's book without my having translated it into comprehensible Italian, since the language of the current text is German, Croatian, Greek, Jewish, or Ostrogothic, but it is not Italian. Are we clear? Please keep me informed.

That the Italian translation was merely a pretext is demonstrated by the fact that, when he later authorized a second edition and revised the text of the first edition in preparation for it, the stylistic corrections were very few, while the substantive changes were numerous and significant, including the deletion of entire, lengthy passages.

These editorial setbacks regarding the *Colloqui*, combined, on the one hand, with the fact that Mussolini immediately adopted a critical stance toward Ludwig (whose work was enjoying enormous success worldwide), implying—and even stating in private—that the German writer had distorted and at times even falsified his thoughts and had put untrue statements into his mouth, and, on the other hand, the attacks that many Fascists launched against Ludwig—both privately and sometimes even publicly and in the press—have led many to argue—as we have said—that the *Colloqui con Mussolini* is not a reliable source for reconstructing Mussolini's thought.

Our opinion, however, is—as has been stated—the opposite. If Mussolini regretted having authorized the publication of the *Conversations* in the form in which they appeared, it was certainly not because of some inaccuracy on Ludwig's part, or because of some naivety or minor lie on his part—which could easily be identified—nor—much less—because they actually distorted his thoughts.

He regretted it (and therefore sought—since there was nothing left to be done at that point—to insinuate that they were unreliable and to limit their circulation in Italy as much as possible) because, in his conversations with Ludwig, partly so as not to appear reticent, partly because he was flattered by the insistence of such a well-known journalist, he had been too brutally candid and had let himself say things that, politically speaking, he would have been better off keeping to himself.

This, in the final analysis, was also Ludwig's opinion many years later. But even if we consider Ludwig's opinion to be of little weight—since it could be suspected of being biased—the fact that, in September 1932, Mussolini decided to republish *The Doctrine of Fascism* as a standalone volume, and deemed it appropriate to supplement the first part of the entry in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (the one written by Gentile) with an extensive series of bibliographical notes and quotations drawn from his own writings and speeches (evidently to put an end to the rumors already circulating that Gentile—and not Mussolini—was the author of the first part of the entry, as well as the related insinuations and accusations that it did not reflect Mussolini's thinking), some of these were drawn precisely from the *Colloqui*.

And they were included with the full and explicit consent of the Duce, to whom—to avoid any missteps—Gentile had sent a request via his private secretary on September 26 asking whether he agreed to the citation of passages from the *Colloqui*. This, for better or worse, amounted to an endorsement not only of the cited passages but of the entire work, which, moreover, was not officially disavowed.

With this issue also clarified, we can now examine the nature of the "moral idea" upon which Mussolini's political action was based during this period. The core of this idea is easily summarized. Western civilization, especially European civilization, was in crisis everywhere: "In every country, uncertainty, unease, and moral distress—compounding material hardship—reign; even peoples of ancient civilizations seem leaderless and uncertain of their destiny."

The great European empires had either been overwhelmed by the 1914–18 war or were in crisis and essentially lacked the inner capacity to recover, whether through traditional means or by developing new values and new systems of hegemony.

“Europe is no longer the continent that leads human civilization. This is the dramatic realization that those who have a duty to think must acknowledge to themselves and to others. There was a time when Europe dominated the world politically, spiritually, and economically… But across the Atlantic, great industrial and capitalist enterprises have developed.

In the Far East, it is Japan that… is advancing in great strides toward the West.” The economy, torn apart by the conflicts between capital and labor, had reached the stage of “supercapitalism” (“the utopia of unlimited consumption: the ideal of supercapitalism would be the standardization of humankind from the cradle to the grave”); it, too, had by then—especially after the outbreak of the “Great Depression”— —had reached such a point of crisis that one could no longer speak of a crisis within the system, but rather of a crisis of the system: “the crisis has penetrated so deeply into the system that it has become a crisis of the system.”

Growing urbanization and declining birth rates were the most evident symptoms of this moral and material crisis: “industrial urbanization leads populations to sterility;… all nations and all empires have felt the bite of their decline when they have seen their birth rates fall… population is one of the factors of national wealth; it constitutes the physical and real strength of the state, since the number of inhabitants is the sole measure of a state’s power.”

Finally, on the political level, the general crisis of Western civilization found its counterpart in the crisis of the great nineteenth-century systems: liberalism, socialism, and democracy. Thus, it could well be said that the West had reached the eve of a new cycle in its civilization.

According to Mussolini, however, the crisis had not reached the same level of severity in all countries, and—above all—the “younger” countries from a national perspective—and therefore poorer and more accustomed to sacrifice—still had the opportunity not only to hold it at bay but—bolstered by their youthful energy—to assert their vital power, their moral strength, and their “dominion.”

At the forefront of these potentially “young” countries was Italy.

It was, however, burdened by a long history of subjugation and, subsequently, by a series of weak and inept governments that had for a long time turned it into a “gesticulating, talkative, superficial, carnivalesque” country, unaware of its own potential and the place it could have held in the world. First the Great War and then Fascism had shaken Italy out of its torpor and had opened up and pointed out a path and a destination for it. Fascism (and, on the opposite end of the spectrum, Soviet communism) was the great new development of the 20th century, the salvation of Italy and, in essence, of Europe: “Fascism is the only new thing that the first thirty years of this century have seen in the political and social spheres”; “Fascist Italy stands at the midday of the 20th century as the only nation that has a message and a doctrine of salvation and life to offer to all the civilized peoples of the earth… we are convinced that Fascism will be the model of European and Italian civilization for this century.”

While, on the one hand, Mussolini believed that Fascism had opened up and pointed out a path and a goal for Italy, on the other hand, he was by then convinced that Italians were practically incapable of following that path and reaching that goal.

Aside from “the blind spots of national life” that still needed to be brought under fascist control, Italians were, in Mussolini’s view, a people “of all-too-easy optimism, of the negligence that sometimes follows overly rapid and excessive diligence,” prone to “being deceived after the first test,” and

inclined to “believe that everything is accomplished when it has not yet begun.”

In short, a people who lacked the “character” necessary to be truly fascist and to behave in a fascist manner. So much so that the Fascist Party itself reproduced within its ranks the very limitations and flaws that were characteristic of the people.

Hence, for Mussolini, the need, the necessity, the duty—as one who realized what was at stake—of those whom Spengler called “Caesarian individuals,” that is, in essence, the Duce—to induce the Italian people to be truly fascist and to follow the path that had been opened before them all the way to the goal. And to induce them by any means justified by the end, even the most extreme and coercive; and without delay, since, on the one hand, the European crisis left no room for it and, on the other hand, because Mussolini (with his typical blend of egocentrism and realism) realized—as he told Ludwig—that there would be no “number two Duce” and that, in any case, “if one were to emerge, Italy would not tolerate him.”

From this set of convictions, ultimately, stemmed all those conclusions that, in practice, formed the very foundation of Mussolini’s political outlook. On the one hand, it was, as usual, a matter of “holding out”; at any cost, by any means, consolidating support through a policy that appealed “to the people” (and which, in practice, was characterized above all by the attempt to keep retail prices and unemployment in check—generally by employing labor in public works—and by the development of social welfare) and kept the charismatic myth of the Duce alive.

In this sense, to fully assess Mussolini’s psychological and cultural attitude and how it translated into a standard of political action, Mussolini’s own statements to Ludwig about the masses, their sentiments, and their “treatment” by the politician are extremely significant; and it is highly likely that he must have regretted letting some of these statements slip out once they were printed.

“The masses,” he told Ludwig, “love strong men. To me, the masses are nothing more than a flock of sheep, as long as they are not organized. I am not at all against them. I merely deny that they can govern themselves. But if you lead them, you must guide them with two reins: enthusiasm and self-interest. Anyone who relies on only one of the two is in danger.”

The mystical and the political influence one another: one without the other dissipates into the wind of the banners. You cannot expect the masses to embrace a life of hardship—that is reserved for the few… Music and gifts are the leaven of the crowd and make it lighter. The Roman salute, all the slogans, dates, and commemorations are indispensable for maintaining the pathos of a movement.

So it was in ancient Rome… Only faith moves mountains, not reason. Reason is a tool but can never be the driving force of the masses. Today less so than before. People today have less time to think. The modern man’s disposition to believe is incredible… Everything depends on this: dominating the masses like an artist.

On the other hand—once the masses had been won over to the "fascist gospel," the two triads "authority, order, justice" and "believe, obey, fight" —the aim was, instead, to transform the Italian people by creating new generations that were more numerous and stronger—both physically and morally—as "Fascists," free from the limitations and flaws of the generations on which Mussolini had had to, and still had to, base his actions. This, ultimately, was the true trump card on which Mussolini was staking virtually all his hopes at that time, with a conviction, a commitment, and a fanaticism that reached the absurdity of thinking, of demanding, of changing not only the Italians' way of life and thinking, but even their very character.

In November 1931, speaking at the third congress of the Fascist Doctors' Union, he stated in no uncertain terms:

I am deeply convinced that the way we eat, dress, work, and sleep—the whole complex of our daily habits—must be reformed. We must allow the elements of nature to act upon our bodies—air, sun, and movement—if we truly wish—in Carducci's words—to descend among the great shadows, without a petty heart and constricted lungs.

Mussolini's statement was even more drastic: "To govern the Italians, two things are needed: police and music in the squares."

And, along with the bodies, he wanted to change minds and spirits: We must scrape away and pulverize, in the character and mentality of Italians, the sediment deposited by those terrible centuries of political, military, and moral decadence, stretching from the 1600s to the rise of Napoleon. A monumental task.

The Risorgimento was merely the beginning, for it was the work of far too small a minority; the World War, on the other hand, was profoundly educational. The task now is to continue, day by day, this work of reshaping the character of Italians.

If it had been possible, Mussolini's true ideal—as he himself had confessed as early as 1925—would have been to create the new generations in a laboratory:

By bringing into life everything that it would be a grave error to confine to politics, we will create, through a process of relentless and tenacious selection, the generations, and within these new generations, everyone will have a defined role. Sometimes I am amused by the idea of “laboratory generations”—that is, creating the class of warriors, who are always ready to die; the class of inventors, who pursue the secrets of the unknown; the class of judges; the class of great captains of industry; of great explorers, of great governors. And it is through this methodical selection that the great categories are created, which in turn create empires.

What we have been saying, it seems to us, demonstrates how wrong it would be to believe that by the late 1920s and early 1930s Mussolini had by then lost any fundamental political vision and was essentially capable only of entrenching himself in a policy of routine administration that took no account of the aspirations, second thoughts, and moods that, on the contrary, characterized the attitude of the ruling class and the Fascist Party.

And it would be even more mistaken to use this erroneous belief to explain why, during this same period, Mussolini began to involve Italy more and more in international politics, thereby establishing an explicit link between the supposed stagnation of the Duce’s initiative in domestic politics and his new interest in foreign affairs; in short, as if this were essentially dictated by the need to create a series of diversions that would distract Italians from domestic problems and, at the same time, restore luster to the Duce’s now-fading image.

Since we will discuss Mussolini’s foreign policy at length in the coming chapters, there is no point in anticipating here the reasons for our refusal to accept the second of these two alleged explanations. As for the first explanation—given what we have been saying and since the entire next chapter is devoted to domestic events from 1929 to 1934—we are now interested only in highlighting the overall, general characteristics that Mussolini sought to imprint—and in part did imprint—on his domestic policy during this period; characteristics that, if they appear unclear and obscure at first glance, are so for two very specific reasons:

a) the fundamental difficulties that Mussolini’s political initiative encountered in unfolding in the economic and social spheres due to the persistence—despite the regime’s gradual strengthening—of the precarious political and social balance that had been established between Fascism and the pre-existing Italian ruling class through the compromise that had helped make possible Mussolini’s consolidation of power after the “Matteotti crisis”;

b) the addition to these underlying difficulties of the very serious ones caused to the Italian economy—and, by extension, to a certain extent also to the regime—by the Great Depression of 1929 and its spread to Italy, as well as to the rest of Europe and most non-European countries.

Contrary to first impressions, Mussolini—having concluded a very specific phase of his rule with the Conciliation and the “plebiscite”—actually had his own policy for the years immediately ahead, one that was, in its own way, quite well-defined.

However, this policy should not be sought in the immediate or even indirect political sphere (such as corporatism, for example). In this sphere, in fact, Mussolini set for himself only objectives that were

essentially aimed at maintaining and refining the status quo; although this did not mean a priori renouncing the opportunity to exploit any possibilities offered by the situation, and, even more so, to erode—should the occasion arise—the margins of autonomy and power that the other components of the regime had secured for themselves.

The arena for the implementation of Mussolini's political initiative in this new phase was a different one, directly or indirectly connected to the new dimension, the new times, and the new perspective within which Mussolini was now positioning himself and fascism: it was the realm of agricultural policy, demographic policy, public works, and above all, the national education of youth and mass "popular culture" for Italians in general.

Compared to these, all other issues—however important they might be—essentially took a back seat for Mussolini at this time.

On September 16, 1929, Mussolini moved his official residence as head of government from Palazzo Chigi (which remained the seat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, just as the Viminale had remained the seat of the Ministry of the Interior when he had moved to Palazzo Chigi) to Palazzo Venezia. Sometimes acts that are in themselves simple, even trivial, take on—as is well known—a special, symbolic significance. There is no doubt that by moving to Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini intended to make a gesture marking the beginning of a new era in his rule: Mussolini now felt, in every respect, that he was the Duce, the Caesar-like figure who shaped the history of the new Italy; even his official residence had to be historic—both in terms of the past and the present—isolated yet at the same time in direct contact with the vestiges of that Rome of the Caesars that Mussolini sought to emulate.

And, on closer inspection, during this period Mussolini not only changed his official residence but sought—if not exactly to change, then certainly to modify—his very "image." Until then, Italians had known him above all as the fighter, as the leader of Fascism, as the confident and far-sighted politician.

From then on, this image was gradually overlaid by another: that of the builder of a new civilization, of Mussolini—to borrow the famous title of one of the most typical works of Mussolini-apologetics from the second half of the 1930s—"the engine of the century."

2. The Years of Consensus: The Country.

By the second half of 1929, the Fascist regime had entered—as we have already noted—a new phase in its history, a phase that can be defined as its maturity. At least on the domestic front, it had by then made its fundamental choices, established its balances and structure, and adopted its most characteristic institutions.

In the short term—and, essentially, in the medium term as well—it was very difficult to foresee that—barring exceptional and, at that moment, unforeseeable events—these choices, these balances, this framework, and these structures could undergo substantial changes. Both the regime as such and the distinctive characteristics it had come to assume during the nearly seven years of Mussolini's

government lacked, in fact, any real alternative.

The international situation was certainly not such as to put the regime in difficulty. As for the domestic situation, it must be realistically acknowledged that, despite all its difficulties (especially economic ones), it was never as favorable to the regime as it was during the five years following the “plebiscite” and the Conciliation.

In later years, especially in the wake of nationalistic enthusiasm for the “conquest of the Empire,” the regime certainly still enjoyed great prestige; however, as we shall see, these were brief periods in which popular support was quite vociferous but, on closer inspection, less plebiscitary in nature and, above all, tinged with concerns for the future and, in particular, a need to “catch one’s breath” and to “pull in the oars,” which revealed the emergence, within the broader consensus, of more nuanced positions and, above all, states of mind less inclined toward a charismatic acceptance of the regime’s policies as a whole.

Between 1929 and the end of 1934, public support did not reach the heights of enthusiasm and exaltation it would attain in 1936; in fact, however, it was more widespread and, above all, more totalitarian—or, if you prefer, less tinged with reservations, critical sentiments, or concerns about the future.

State authority was not fundamentally questioned by the vast majority of Italians; the “moral model” of Fascism was widely accepted and did not, for most people, create conflicts between the public and private spheres; the regime’s policies as a whole did not appear either dangerous or irrational, and, consequently, the bureaucracy and the technical elite had not yet experienced the decline in efficiency that would occur later, in parallel with the emergence and consolidation of a new state of mind characterized by skepticism and even distrust regarding the validity of politicians’ technical decisions; finally, the average citizen—the “good citizen”—still had relatively few direct contacts with the party, so that his private life was affected—for the time being—only very rarely and in a minor way; consequently, for him, the benefits—whether real or perceived—that the regime provided outweighed the disadvantages on the whole.

This is why, looking back today at the entire span of the Fascist period with no other concern than to understand it historically—without allowing ourselves to be influenced by the uproar that certain events caused in Italy and abroad—we believe that, all things considered, it is fair to say that the five-year period from 1929 to 1934 was, for the Fascist regime and, in essence, for Mussolini as well, the time of greatest popular support and greatest stability. Nor, for that matter, is this assessment ours alone; others have already expressed it.

It is quite significant—to give just one example—to find it in a book such as *The Fruits of Fascism* by Herbert L. Matthews, the *New York Times* correspondent in Italy, written during World War II and certainly not suspect of bias toward fascism. In it, one can in fact read the following assessment of this period:

The Duce truly enjoyed enormous popular support during those years; this support was directed more toward him personally than toward the regime, although, as far as one can judge, the majority of the people were undoubtedly also in favor of Fascism. Italians are a practical and realistic people who were bound to support or oppose Fascism in proportion to its material success or failure.

During the years I am writing about, Fascism, on the whole, met the needs of most Italians, from whom one could not expect an understanding of the destructive nature of the system that was about to lead them to ruin.

However, simply stating that the five-year period from 1929 to 1934 was the time of greatest popular support for Mussolini and the regime is not sufficient; on the one hand, because—in general terms—such a statement cannot ignore an attempt to grasp the nature and limits of this support and its motivations with respect to both the various segments of Italian society at the time and the regime's policies and the figure of Mussolini; on the other hand, because—in more specific terms—the five-year period from 1929 to 1934 coincided with the Great Depression, and it was precisely during this time that the regime had to confront the consequences of the worst economic depression in its history, with all the difficulties typical of periods of crisis—unemployment, wage cuts, unrest, etc.—which, at first glance, do not fit well into an overall picture characterized by public support.

To date, there has been no comprehensive study of the repercussions and course of the Great Depression in Italy. With the exception of specific aspects (such as, for example, the trend in real wages, particularly in agriculture) and, perhaps, the issue of a comparative assessment of the extent to which the "Great Crisis" affected the Italian economy and the economies of other major European countries, the available data and specific studies are, however, sufficient to provide a fairly accurate picture of these developments. To put it simply, we can identify some fairly precise and indicative reference points.

The first signs of the "Great Depression" began to be felt in Italy toward the end of 1929. In more ways than one, the "Great Depression" thus coincided with and became intertwined with the final stages of the crisis linked to the "90 percent quota."

It should also be noted that, although the Italian economy had not yet emerged from the stabilization crisis by the end of 1929, it was by then well on its way to overcoming it.

Overall, 1929 had been a year of recovery that, under different general conditions, would have offered hope for the future.

Per capita national income had risen, albeit slightly: from 3,046 to 3,079 lire. Although agricultural prices had fallen significantly and, on the whole, remained unprofitable, agricultural production was increasing across the board, and its value (in millions of lire and based on 1913 prices) had risen considerably: in 1926 it stood at 8,138, in 1927 at 7,165, in 1928 at 7,752, and in 1929 it had risen to 9,038 (in 1930 it would fall to 8,259).

As for industry, even Confindustria—which was always inclined to paint a very cautious picture of the situation, one with more shadows than bright spots (especially regarding profits)—had to acknowledge that, "taken as a whole, industrial activity in 1929 was, in any case, somewhat more intense than in the previous year." Suffice it to say that the industrial activity index—calculated based on the hours

worked by the workforce—which had fallen from 100 in October 1927 to 94.61 a year later, had risen to 120.39 by October 1929, while average unemployment had fallen from 324,422 in 1928 to 300,786 in 1929, and underemployment had been cut in half. As for imports of raw materials, they had increased by 11.15%, while exports of manufactured goods had risen by 10.67%.

This picture, on the whole quite encouraging, nevertheless also had its dark sides—some long-standing, others more recent. To attempt to eliminate them, or at least reduce them, would require time and, above all, the continuation of the trend toward growth in production that—despite the downturn caused by stabilization—had characterized the years since the end of the war.

In this situation, the "Great Crisis" not only prevented the final overcoming of the last vestiges of the "90% quota" policy but also plunged the entire Italian economy into a crisis far more severe than the one from which it was hoped to be nearing recovery; a crisis from which it would not fully recover until 1937–38, after the crisis itself had been followed by a period of stagnation (common, moreover, to the entire Western economy), and which, especially during the first five years or so, put it to a very severe test.

All scholars are essentially in agreement on this overall assessment, and as for the aggregate data and indices gradually compiled (by the Ministry of Corporations, the Central Institute of Statistics, Confindustria, and individual scholars), it must be said that, while they sometimes show significant differences, they are all unequivocal in confirming that, with the exception of specific sectors, the Italian economy did not manage to recover its 1929 levels until 1937–38.

There is less agreement, however, when attempting to compare the impact of the crisis on the Italian economy with that on the economies of other European countries.

In this regard, the few assessments available are generally quite cautious and more divergent than those concerning the course and consequences of the crisis on the Italian economy.

A comparison of this kind, however, may be of considerable interest for the purposes of our discussion; it can in fact be very useful in assessing the effectiveness of the measures adopted by the Fascist government to address the crisis and—more generally—how this influenced the attitude toward the regime of the various segments of Italian society, and first and foremost those least integrated into it; hence the need to take into account—albeit for largely indicative purposes—all the available data and points of reference.

One such point of reference is the trend in various national income figures; other elements include indices related to industrial production.

According to estimates by Paretti and Bloch, for example, Italian industrial production in 1929 was equal to 8.2% of that of Western Europe and in 1937 to 8%; during the same period, industrial output per capita rose from an index of 28 to 31, despite a significant increase in population, while the overall index for Western Europe rose from 60 to 67 (though the French index plummeted from 72 to 64).

During the years of the "Great Depression" and the subsequent stagnation, the rapid growth recorded in previous years was thus interrupted (in 1901–13 and 1920–29, the Italian index had grown faster than the European one), without, however, Italian industrial production substantially falling behind that of Europe (from 1929 to 1937, the Italian index rose from 88 to 101, while that of Western Europe rose from 86 to 102), and the Italian economy as a whole actually improved its productivity: according to C.

Clark’s calculations, real net output per man-hour rose from 0.229 international units in 1926–30 to 0.231 in 1931–35 and to 0.252 in 1936–40.

And this is essentially confirmed, over the long term, by the conclusions reached by W. A. Lewis regarding global trends in manufacturing output; “Between 1913 and 1936–39,” he wrote, “the percentage share of Russia, Japan, India, Sweden, and Finland increased… while Italy’s share remained unchanged, and those of the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Belgium decreased.”

During the crucial years of the crisis (essentially until 1933–34), no sector of the Italian economy managed to remain unscathed. However, not all were affected by the crisis to the same extent.

The first repercussions of the Wall Street crash, at the end of October 1929, were felt in Italy’s stock market. As Aquarone wrote:

between 1929 and 1932, stock prices fell by a little more than one-third. This decline was not dramatic, especially when compared to what had happened in the United States and elsewhere.

This was due in part to the fact that Italian stock exchanges traded almost exclusively in Italian securities, whereas these were virtually nonexistent on foreign exchanges; and in part to the fact that the major banks—which were the principal holders of the hardest-hit securities—rushed to intervene actively in the stock market in order to keep prices as high as possible. In doing so, however, while they contributed significantly to preventing a full-scale collapse of stock prices, they exacerbated their own liquidity crisis and thus made themselves more vulnerable to the consequences of the impending industrial crisis.

Far more serious were the consequences that the crisis had from the very beginning on foreign trade and, in particular, on exports: in 1929, our exports had totaled 14,767 million; in 1930, they fell to 12,119 million, continuing to decline to 5,224 million in 1935; at the same time, imports suffered an even more drastic contraction: from 21,303 million in 1929 to 7,675 million in 1934.

Equally severe was the collapse in wholesale prices: the price index fell from 102 in 1929 to 75 in 1933, with even more pronounced declines in the agricultural sector, which was not only the hardest hit but also the one that would recover most slowly, with greater difficulty, and in some areas (especially livestock farming) not even fully.

A few figures illustrate this better than any lengthy discourse: the wholesale price of soft wheat (per q) fell from 130 lire in 1929 to 86 in 1934; that of durum wheat from 140 to 101; that of oats from 86 to 54; that of corn from 98 to 55; that of paddy rice from 97 to 54, that of olive oil from 604 to 504, that of wine (per hl) from 112 to 76, that of hemp from 392 to 312, that of oranges from 119 to 64, milk (per hl) from 81 to 36, calves from 609 to 300, and pigs from 646 to 340.

Under these circumstances, agricultural income fell by about 50% within a few years, while exports also declined significantly. This led to a general deterioration in the living conditions of all rural social classes and even a certain decline in small-scale farming, especially among the most recently established holdings (according to some estimates, this phenomenon affected about 30% of the 125,000 small farms established in northern Italy since the end of the war and about 10% in other regions).

In the industrial sector, the drop in prices was less pronounced than in the agricultural sector; nevertheless, the consequences of the crisis were also very severe for this sector.

We have already examined the general index of industrial production for these years. For a more detailed picture, it may be useful to also consider the sector-by-sector index compiled by Confindustria (base 1929=100), even though it does not include some very important sectors, such as mining and, above all, the chemical industry.

A direct consequence of the collapse in wholesale prices—both agricultural and industrial—was a general decline in retail prices.

Although significant, this decline was—despite numerous government measures designed to encourage and enforce it—slower than that of wholesale prices and proportionally less pronounced.

An inevitable consequence of the massive contraction in production, on the other hand, was rising unemployment, which—albeit to varying degrees—affected all sectors of the economy, particularly the industrial sector and, within that sector, small and medium-sized enterprises in particular.

It should also be noted that the burden borne by agriculture was greater than it appears at first glance: to the direct burden of unemployment and underemployment must be added the indirect burden resulting from the spillover of a portion of industrial unemployment into agriculture. A series of data collected by trade unions (especially Confindustria), the National Social Insurance Fund, the Ministry of Corporations, and the Ministry of the Interior make it possible to determine with reasonable accuracy the general trend of unemployment during the harshest years of the crisis, as well as the impact of the phenomenon on various sectors.

Based on this body of data, it can be stated that in October 1929—that is, on the eve of the first repercussions of the American crisis—the number of unemployed stood at approximately 304,000; by December of that same year, their number had already risen to over 426,000 and had begun to climb at a rate—taking into account the normal seasonal fluctuations to which employment was subject—that was essentially constant, reaching its peak in the winter of ’33–’34.

The number of unemployed began to decline only in 1934, though it never returned to the 1929 level: in 1935, the number of unemployed was, in fact, still over 765,000. According to available data, the share of the total unemployed population attributable to agriculture, hunting, and fishing averaged approximately 103,000 in 1930 (about 89,000 in 1929), 165,000 in 1931, and over 200,000 in 1932–33.

To obtain an accurate picture of the situation, these figures must be supplemented by those relating to underemployment (workers on reduced hours or working shifts), which can be estimated for 1930–33 at between 20 and 31 percent of the employed population, with even higher peaks in certain sectors, such as the textile industry.

For industry, it is possible to delve deeper into the analysis by using the data that the Ministry of Corporations collected monthly from approximately 6,500 factories spread across twenty-four industrial sectors. With regard to overall employment in industry, these data allow us to calculate the following index (September 1926 = 100): December 1929: 95.7; December 1930: 84.9; December 1931: 74.2; December 1932: 68.7; October 1933: 69.9.

Another consequence of the crisis was a general reduction in wages and salaries. As noted in the previous volume, these had already suffered significant declines in ’27–’28, during the height of the stabilization crisis.

Nevertheless, following the initial repercussions of the American crisis, the Italian business community and its representatives had immediately begun to demand, with growing insistence, further wage cuts, arguing that without them it would be impossible to avoid drastic reductions in the workforce and, in many cases, even the suspension of production, which, they claimed, was by then operating at a near-loss.

Despite some attempts at resistance by the Fascist unions, in certain sectors (such as, for example, natural and artificial silk, which alone employed just under 200,000 workers), employers managed to impose significant reductions as early as the initial phase of the crisis. Cuts also occurred during the same period in agriculture (the nominal wage index, which, according to the National Confederation of Fascist Agricultural Unions, stood at 532.48 in 1929, fell to 513.34 in 1930).

As the winter of 1930–31 approached, demands for wage cuts had become so widespread that the government was forced to intervene, authorizing them in the name of the need to aid the Italian economy in crisis and to address the ongoing decline in the cost of living in the country.

On November 28, 1930, the industrial confederations were thus authorized to sign an agreement under which, effective December 1, workers’ total wages were reduced by 8%.

The reduction did not apply to men over the age of eighteen who earned less than 12 lire per day in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants and less than 8 lire in other localities, nor to those who worked only three days or fewer per week. For workers who had already undergone wage reductions in the previous six months, the agreement applied only to any remaining differences.

Also effective December 1, white-collar workers’ salaries were reduced by 8% and 10% if they exceeded 300 and 1,000 lire per month, respectively.

The agreement immediately triggered, on the one hand, a series of similar agreements for other categories of workers (particularly severe was the one for agricultural day laborers and salaried farm workers, which established varying reductions, depending on the region, ranging from 10 to 25 percent); and, on the other hand, to several attempts—which ultimately failed—by the Fascist labor unions to limit and reduce the established cuts to some extent, by interpreting the signed agreements in a restrictive manner.

Overall, it was estimated that the reductions affected approximately 2.5 million industrial workers (out of just under 3,100,000), resulting in annual savings for employers of approximately one billion; approximately 2,900,000 agricultural workers, resulting in annual savings for landowners of approximately 1,218 million; and approximately 528,000 government employees—in addition to those employed by local and parastatal entities—resulting in annual savings for the government alone of 725

million.

These reductions, however, did not satisfy employers. By mid-1931, not only had demands for further reductions become numerous and insistent once again, but a whole series of reductions had already been implemented piecemeal, under the threat of suspending work or, at the very least, further reducing employment, and others were underway, especially in industry.

In this situation, with winter approaching, Bottai found himself compelled to refer all decisions regarding wage levels personally to Mussolini, drafting a “memo for His Excellency the Head of Government,” which is worth reproducing in its entirety:

The issue of the wage policy to be followed in the coming months must be considered separately for industry and for agriculture.

INDUSTRY

Since the last time the Central Corporate Committee addressed wage policy until today, the situation in industry has remained stagnant in a few sectors and has worsened in many others; consequently, wage levels have fallen further.

The inter-confederal agreement of November 28 followed other reductions that had previously affected wages to varying degrees and were intended to constitute a definitive—or at least a lasting—adjustment of labor costs to the new conditions created by the crisis.

Instead, in the wake of its conclusion, after a very brief respite, a major and nearly universal decline in workers’ wages began, so that it can be said that the agreement was merely the beginning of a new and even greater process of reduction—a process that is still ongoing and shows no signs of stopping.

Despite the extremely difficult times, this Ministry has succeeded in concluding several collective bargaining agreements of great importance and in resolving a great many labor disputes; but it has had to acknowledge that its work became increasingly difficult day by day, as the parties were reduced to defending not so much interests that were more or less flexible, but their very conditions of existence.

In its actions, the Ministry was guided by a principle that seemed the only viable course: it sought, in other words, to alleviate the strain on industrial activity, without, however, imposing sacrifices on workers beyond the limits permitted by the Labor Charter and by a sense of human endurance—that is, by striving, as far as possible, to prevent wages from falling below the minimums stipulated in collective bargaining agreements.

Today, the process of standardizing and adjusting contractual minimum wages can be said to be complete; however, other sources of difficulty for industry have emerged, not least the collapse of the pound sterling, which, while facilitating British exports, is bound to create new obstacles for some of our own industries.

Therefore, at this juncture, it is necessary to have a clear and certain path before us, one that we can follow without hesitation: should we allow the line of defense represented by the minimum wages stipulated in the contracts—which, it should be noted, has already been breached—to be definitively overrun, or must we continue to defend it?

Political considerations conflict with economic ones and make the choice highly uncertain.

From a political standpoint, it is undoubtedly desirable that as many companies as possible remain in business so that as many workers as possible can find employment—even if this means wages below the contractual minimums. This consideration is underscored by the looming prospect of a harsh winter that will bring further unemployment.

From an economic standpoint, however, it would be desirable for unhealthy or unviable companies to disappear. It is usually these companies that are the first to request and obtain wage cuts, in the hope of thus withstanding competition from other solid and healthy companies—or those not burdened by interest payments. But once a reduction is granted to one company, it must, sooner or later, be extended to all of them; thus, the differences between one company and another immediately resurface unchanged, reproducing exactly the same causes of hardship that the first companies had attempted to eliminate through the reduction.

In any case, since there is an urgent and pressing need for a general directive, and since the issue involves the policy and stance of the Government and the nation in the face of the crisis, it would be appropriate for the Central Corporate Committee, under the high presidency of Your Excellency, to be called upon to express its opinion on the matter.

AGRICULTURE

In the agricultural sector as well, the crisis—which continues to persist and has indeed worsened, particularly in certain sectors (e.g., rice cultivation, livestock production), has had repercussions on the wage system; and in this field as well, the reductions implemented through the interconfederal agreement of December 1, 1930—which were particularly severe in some sectors—have been followed by new demands for wage cuts from employers, who maintain that, especially in certain regions, agricultural wages are still at a level that allows for further reductions; and that these are indispensable to provide the agricultural economy with the means to successfully overcome the current period of crisis.

The Ministry of Corporations has, in the agricultural sector as well, carried out effective conciliation efforts in recent months, succeeding in concluding—during the revision of certain agricultural labor agreements—arrangements under which farmers were granted further wage reductions.

However, at present, while employers believe—as has already been mentioned—that further adjustments could and should be made, the workers' union representatives maintain, on the other hand, that wage rates have already been adjusted to meet production needs, reaching a limit that cannot be reduced any further.

Indeed, the Confederation of Fascist Agricultural Unions has proposed that, through the Ministry's conciliatory efforts, a general agreement be reached with the Confederation of Farmers to extend the duration of collective bargaining agreements for agricultural employees and farm laborers.

This is a general measure, valid for one year, intended to ensure the stability of the current wage rates for that period.

It has also requested, to address agricultural unemployment—which is also expected to be quite severe this coming winter— that the labor quota be extended, with adjustments deemed most appropriate in light of varying local conditions; and that the shift system be made mandatory not only for field work but also for public works projects intended to combat unemployment—projects that are carried out overwhelmingly by workers from the agricultural sector.

This proposal, which, if accepted, would lead to a one-year moratorium on collective bargaining and wage increases and could thus resolve the issue of wage policy in the agricultural sector for the same period, should be submitted for review and consideration by the Central Corporative Committee, which, under Your Excellency's guidance, will be able to indicate the most appropriate guidelines to follow.

Despite pressure from the Minister of Corporations, however, Mussolini did not make any direct decision; he did not authorize a new general reduction in wages, but neither did he do anything to truly prevent employers from continuing their slow but systematic erosion of wages.

His only positive—albeit indirect—actions were twofold: on the one hand, he issued new and stricter instructions to central and local authorities to promote, in every way possible, the adjustment of retail prices to the new wholesale prices and to monitor compliance by intermediaries and retailers; on the other hand, it issued directives for the Labor Courts to expedite their intervention procedures and swiftly resolve the disputes submitted to them by the legal offices of the provincial labor unions.

Under these conditions, the situation dragged on practically until April 26, 1934, when a new agreement was authorized (which other sectors quickly adopted as well) that, effective May 15, stipulated that industrial wages that had not been reduced beyond the levels established on November 28, 1930, would be further reduced by 7%, and that those already reduced would be adjusted to this percentage.

Given a certain improvement in the overall situation (at least as a trend) and in response to a persistent demand from the unions, it was nevertheless stipulated that the reduction was contingent upon the signing of collective bargaining agreements in companies that had not yet done so.

Six months later, in October, two new interconfederal agreements also established the introduction of the forty-hour workweek (this agreement, which was primarily aimed at increasing employment and reducing unemployment—and which, in fact, led to the reabsorption of approximately 222,000 workers—was subsequently enshrined in law) and, as a counterbalance to the reduction in weekly wages caused by this agreement, the introduction of family allowances.

Following these agreements, wages and salaries remained stable—but only briefly, as employers in many cases attempted to push for further reductions.

However, with the economic situation now improved and the general political landscape having changed, this led to the Fascist Confederation of Industrial Workers terminating the agreement of April of the previous year, effective October 1, 1935, and the start of a new phase in wage development: by 1936, salaries and wages finally began to rise again; within four years, those in the industrial sector increased by 34–40% (depending on whether monthly or hourly wages are considered).

From what we have been saying, it is clear that during the years of the "Great Crisis," wages—and especially the wages of Italian workers—suffered a significant reduction, which—if we limit ourselves to considering only the two general reductions of 1930 and 1934—amounted to 15% for industry, while

for agriculture it was much greater, even though it is difficult—given the current state of research—to venture specific figures and percentages, given the diversity of local agricultural situations and the proliferation of contracts and categories; in any case, the reduction ranged between 20 and 40%.

These figures—which are generally optimistic, especially with regard to smaller businesses—must obviously be considered within a broader context to be meaningful, in light of at least two factors of decisive importance: the number of hours actually worked and therefore paid (which we know with reasonable accuracy for industry, but about which we know practically nothing for agriculture) and the cost of living—regarding which, as is well known, we have various indices that have, however, been the subject of criticism and must be treated with some caution, as they are most likely too optimistic.

In addition to these two factors—though this would take the discussion much further afield—we must obviously take into account the impact of unemployment on the overall condition of the entire working class and, to begin with, on household budgets.

Now, if we take the first two elements mentioned above into account, the data at our disposal lead to two different ways of assessing the condition of Italian workers. On the one hand, we have the general trend in wages over the long term: in this regard, it should be emphasized that in 1938 the overall index of real wages was practically the same as in 1913 (1913=100; 1938=100.5)—that is, much lower than the peak reached in 1921 (127).

From a strictly wage-based perspective, there is therefore no doubt that during the years of the regime, workers' conditions did not improve and, in fact, worsened compared to what they had achieved during the "Red Biennium," even though this assessment must be partially adjusted in light of the benefits—not directly related to wages, yet by no means negligible or irrelevant—that large sectors of the workforce obtained during the same period, which will be discussed later.

On the other hand, we have the specific trend in wages during the crisis years. From this perspective, the most reliable indices among those available require us to make two distinct analyses: one for agricultural workers on the one hand, and for industrial workers and civilian government employees on the other.

The only somewhat indicative index available for agriculture shows a gradual decline in real wages between 1930 and 1937: from 100 in 1930 to 86.61 in 1937. The indices for industrial workers and civilian government employees, on the other hand, show that, despite the reductions in nominal wages between 1930 and 1934, real wages during this period did not decline; on the contrary, hourly wages in particular actually increased (and, proportionally, the wages of civil servants over the course of a decade regained much of the ground they had lost relative to those of industrial workers since the years of the Great War).

Even assuming that the available indices for the cost of living and industrial wages (with regard to compliance with inter-union agreements and minimum wages in smaller companies) are optimistic, in light of this data set, it is difficult to argue that the living conditions of employed industrial workers (and the same applies—with even more reliable statistical evidence—to employees of the state, local governments, and parastatal entities) deteriorated significantly during the years of the "Great Crisis."

This is confirmed, among other things, by the trend in private consumption during the same period: considering the general state of the Italian economy, the dire conditions of the peasant population, and the large number of unemployed and underemployed, a decline in private consumption from 2,545 lire

in the five-year period 1926–1930 to 2,440 lire in 1931, 2,492 in ’32, 2,526 in ’33, 2,455 in ’34, and 2,483 in ’35 (in the five-year period ’36–’40, the average was 2,522 lire) does not, in fact, seem sufficient to suggest a genuine collapse in wages.

Therefore, it seems to us that the most accurate conclusion is to view the issue of the living conditions of the Italian working population during the years of the “Great Crisis” in a nuanced manner:

a) due to the unprecedented number of unemployed and underemployed caused by the crisis, the total wage bill underwent a very significant contraction;

b) in this situation, the living conditions of the unemployed and underemployed were extremely precarious (even though the total number of unemployed was partially contained through a vast public works program), partly because many unemployed individuals were ineligible for unemployment benefits, which, in any case, were limited to a maximum of ninety days;

c) The conditions of agricultural workers were also very severe, due both to the sharp decline—even in real terms—in their wages, to the more limited social welfare system compared to that enjoyed by industrial workers, and, finally, because a large portion of the unemployed from the industrial sector turned to agriculture;

d) The situation was substantially different, however, for civil servants (it is more difficult to assess the situation regarding employees of commercial enterprises and the service sector in general) and for industrial workers and white-collar employees (especially in larger industries), whose real wages either increased or remained virtually unchanged, or, in some sectors, if they did decrease, the decrease was minimal, since the drop in the cost of living—caused by the collapse of wholesale prices and actively promoted by the government—offset their otherwise significant nominal reductions.

In this regard, it is significant that a careful examination of the labor press, the proceedings of the congresses of the trade federations and the National Confederation of Fascist Industrial Unions, and, in general, the trade union documents of the time, what characterizes the discontent and the unions’ demands appears to be not so much a challenge to the principle of adjusting wages to the reduced cost of living, but rather other issues: the more general ones concerning the low level that wages had already reached before the crisis, with the cuts of ’27–’28, and the excessively high tax burden, and the more specific but deeply felt issues of the manipulation of piecework rates by a great many companies to increase production without raising wages, and above all the increasingly widespread adoption—to boost productivity—of so-called “scientific” methods of work organization (in particular the Bedaux method), which increased workers’ physical exertion and mental strain without providing them with any economic benefit.

It is within this general economic context that the labor unrest and collective demonstrations of the crisis years must be assessed.

It is evident that while the various forms of strikes—that is, work stoppages by employed workers—peaked in 1930–31, collective demonstrations—which mainly involved the unemployed demanding work or assistance, or workers protesting for economic reasons (primarily against the overall tax burden or the introduction or increase of specific taxes) but not directly related to their jobs—were nearly double in 1931 compared to the previous year and saw a further sharp increase in 1932.

This clearly reflects both the general course of the crisis during the four-year period from 1930 to 1933

and the staggered timing of the crisis's most direct consequences on the working masses; at the same time, it reflects the differing timing of the crisis itself for employed workers and for those who were unemployed or otherwise affected by it—not so much in terms of wages as in terms of the cost of living.

In other words, the general statistical trend documented in the two tables reflects—or at least provides a glimpse of—what is clearly evident from an examination of individual cases of "labor unrest" and "collective demonstrations": the fact that the unrest among employed workers (aimed at preventing wage cuts, layoffs, reduced working hours, increased workloads, etc.) were almost never linked to those of the unemployed or to protests against the tax burden (typical of agricultural areas), and indeed that the former decreased as the latter became more numerous.

This trend and this initial general characterization of the various types of unrest triggered by the crisis during its most intense years indicate—in our view—what, moreover, clearly emerges from a systematic analysis of individual instances of unrest, whether major or minor, involving workers or peasants, and whether carried out by employed workers or by the (more numerous) unemployed: all these protests were driven by purely economic motives—that is, by basic forms of exasperation and weariness stemming from an increasingly dire economic situation—and, for the vast majority of their participants, had only economic aims and served as a general form of protest, without ever taking on a a defined political character—that is, an anti-fascist one—even though in some cases (few in number and generally more frequent among the protests carried out by employed industrial workers than among those led by agricultural workers—among which the only significant exception was probably the protests, in June 1931 by the rice-paddy workers in the Novara and Vercelli areas—and by the unemployed) there were politicized elements among the agitating workers, especially communists, who, however, never succeeded in imparting an effective and lasting political significance to the protests in which they participated and which, in some cases, they managed to lead.

It is certainly not without significance that, in rural areas, some protests against landowners or local administrators were carried out to the cry of "Long live Mussolini." And even more significant is the fact that not even the protests by the unemployed and women that took place in Turin in late November 1930—perhaps, of all of them, the ones that, at the time, most concerned the regime and that could most easily have taken on a political character, given that the city was the least "fascistized" in Italy, the traditions of the Turin working class, and the presence of active anti-fascist groups—did not, for the most part, exhibit the characteristics common to this type of protest in those years.

According to some foreign newspapers, even in Turin, many women—with children in their arms—who were demonstrating alongside their husbands in the streets of the city center reportedly shouted, "Long live the Duce! But we want to eat!"

Nor is this merely our opinion. The authorities of the time—both central and local, including the police and the MVSN—shared this view.

For proof, one need only review the various reports on individual disturbances, the monthly "notes" from the General Directorate of the PS to the Minister of the Interior, and Bocchini's annual reports to the Duce. In the latter, for example, not only was the section devoted to anti-fascist activity always symptomatically kept clearly separate from that devoted to public order (within which the course of "unrest" and "collective demonstrations" was addressed), but the overall assessment of the non-political nature of the unrest was clear and explicit. The 1930 annual report states:

There was no shortage of popular unrest even during this period; however, it must be noted immediately that none of these incidents—with the exception of the one in Martina Franca (Taranto)—can be considered significant. In any case, none of them was driven by political motives, but solely by economic reasons—such as the payment of municipal taxes (the one in Martina Franca concerning the wine consumption tax)—and this was also due to the situation in the labor market… In any case, these disturbances were immediately quelled without further repercussions on local life.

Similar assessments appear in all subsequent annual reports, up to the one for 1934, which states:

The very few disturbances that occurred here and there were purely local in nature, in that they were caused either by the imposition of municipal taxes or by other local factors. Furthermore, they were always limited to a small number of participants; they had no political purpose whatsoever, nor any background worthy of particular note.

Likewise, work has always proceeded regularly and at a steady, unceasing pace across the various sectors of productive activity.

Police action has been vigilant at all times and in all places; where necessary, the police have not failed to intervene promptly to suppress illegal acts and punish the guilty parties.

The failure of the unrest to take on an anti-fascist political character had multiple causes.

It would be wrong to assume that the working masses—and workers in particular—substantially supported the regime. Certainly, as Spriano rightly noted, to assess the workers' reaction during these years, "one must consider more carefully the fact that an entire new generation had entered the production process; a generation indoctrinated and befuddled by fascist propaganda from their school days onward, and throughout all the regime's organizations—a generation that had received no education in class consciousness in the socialist sense and was thus more easily led to accept these deceptions at face value, to believe in these mirages, especially among its most backward strata." But alongside this new generation—which had largely been fascistized—there was still a mass of older workers who had only partially renounced their old sentiments in their hearts.

In the reports of the prefects from the period under consideration here, explicit admissions to this effect

are often found: “The majority of metalworkers and mechanical workers are disciplined, but to a significant extent retain their old political mindset”; “On the whole, the majority of construction workers can be considered disciplined, but they retain their old political mindset, and elements with anarchist or communist leanings prevail among them”; “among the workers, there remain many who, deep down, continue to harbor their old political leanings, even though they remain disciplined and hardworking”; etc.

If the unrest did not take on a political character and did not create particular difficulties for the regime, the reasons were also—and above all—other.

On the one hand, this was certainly due to the watchful vigilance of the regime’s police apparatus and the extensive preventive and repressive measures it implemented—especially after the Turin demonstrations—throughout the country and particularly in working-class circles.

In addition to discouraging any attempts by individuals or small, spontaneous groups of anti-fascist workers to network with one another and to try to give a political character to the economic unrest of their fellow workers, the police succeeded during these years in dealing severe and, for the time being, decisive blows to the clandestine anti-fascist organizations—and above all to the most active and dangerous among them, the Communist Party.

Amid the great crisis, the Communist Party threw all its strength into an effort to take advantage of the situation to expand its organizational base in Italy and to politically guide and direct the working masses, who were worried and discontented due to employment difficulties, wage cuts, and unemployment.

To this end, the best militants who had already emigrated were sent back to their homeland; the party’s organizational network in Italy was woven and re-woven tirelessly with unparalleled courage and a spirit of sacrifice; and the underground press was expanded to the fullest extent: in addition to *L’unità*, *“Avanguardia”*, and *“Lo Stato operaio”*, the communists introduced and sometimes printed in Italy a whole series of newspapers aimed at specific circles and groups, such as *“Battaglie sindacali”*, *La risaia*, *Il lavoratore del mare*, *Compagna*, *Il fanciullo proletario*, *Caserma*, *Soccorso rosso*, etc., as well as a large number of pamphlets and leaflets of a political and militant nature.

Thanks to this enormous effort—and despite some serious political errors—the Communist Party succeeded within two years in significantly expanding (in proportion, of course, to the possibilities available in that historical situation) its clandestine organization, reestablishing contacts with a number of former left-wing activists and forging new ones, especially with youth groups.

By the mid-1930s, there were about 3,000 Communist activists; by the following April, that number had risen to about 4,500; and by mid-July 1932, their total number (adults and youth) stood at about 9,800—the peak the clandestine Communist organization reached during the entire Fascist period (consider that on the eve of the Resistance, the number of PCI members would not have exceeded 5,000).

Despite this undeniable success, the practical results were not, for the Communists, politically commensurate with either the effort expended or the price paid. In the vast majority of cases, in fact, the popular unrest and workers’ struggles of those years were and remained—as has already been noted—spontaneous events that arose and developed outside of any communist influence; and even those in

which the communists became involved—and which, in some cases, led—practically never took on, let alone an insurrectionary or civil war character—which in that situation it would have been absurd to think could occur—nor even an openly and clearly anti-fascist character.

As Togliatti himself acknowledged in September 1931:

all movements that were spontaneous in nature, arising from immediate economic causes, came to a halt before they could take on a character and form that would lead to an open and evident breach of fascist legality. The masses in motion are not yet able to break fascist legality.

Thus, in practice, the concrete political significance of so many efforts and sacrifices made by the Communist Party during this period was quite limited, and even where they were established, the ties that the Communist organization managed to forge in certain limited circles of workers proved to be essentially sporadic, organizationally short-lived, and politically tenuous.

And this negative assessment (in political terms, of course) can only be reaffirmed if, in addition to the concrete results, one considers the price paid by the communists to achieve them.

The price was so high that by 1934, despite the new members recruited in previous years, the Communist Party had no more than 2,400 members in Italy, was in a severe organizational crisis, and had to abandon the idea of maintaining an efficient “internal leadership.”

The years of the “great crisis”—and especially the period between mid-1930 and 1933—were, in fact, a continuous succession of arrests of officials, couriers, and members, which shook the entire clandestine Communist organization to its core, from the top down to the rank and file.

The dry language of numbers speaks louder than any speech:

from January 1, 1931, to September 30, 1932, 2,348 communists were arrested by the police and the OVRA; these arrests were followed by another 1,614 during Year X (1931–1932) and another 1,780 in the final period, through the end of 1934.

A bloodletting, as can be seen, so severe that, realistically, Spriano spoke of the situation that had arisen by 1933 as a “profound organizational crisis of the PCI” and of the exhaustion of the organizational momentum achieved by the party with the so-called “turn” of 1930—a crisis that fully justifies the pride and self-congratulation regarding the effectiveness of their actions that punctuate all the police’s summary reports from those years.

From what we have been saying, it is clear that police surveillance and intervention—both preventive and repressive—certainly constitute an important factor in understanding why the unrest and, more generally, the discontent among broad sectors of the populace during the years of the crisis did not take on a political character and, in practice, did not create any particular difficulties for the regime.

Just as we have noted that it would be wrong to explain the failure of the unrest to take on an anti-fascist political character by arguing that, by this time, the working masses had essentially embraced fascism, it must also be clearly stated that this second argument, on its own, is insufficient to provide a historically valid explanation and would unilaterally distort reality.

To fully understand and assess the attitude of the masses—and of the working classes in particular—we must also take into account other factors, some of a general nature, others concerning specific sectors of the working population.

Among the general factors, the most important—and, in a certain sense, the one that also encapsulates the others—is linked to the global nature of the "Great Crisis."

Faced with the vast scale and exceptional nature of the crisis—skillfully and immediately highlighted by the fascist press and propaganda with a wealth of detail (which, in a country like Italy, where there was scarcely a town without a certain number of emigrants, found prompt and direct confirmation not only from news from relatives and friends abroad, by the not insignificant number of emigrants forced to return home due to the crisis)—regarding the crisis's developments in individual countries and its repercussions on wages and, above all, on employment—the prevailing attitude was the one typical in such circumstances: that of a peasant facing a major natural disaster—that is, an attitude of helplessness, resignation, and hope for the imminent return of better times; an attitude in which, to be sure, there was no shortage of—as we have seen—outbursts of exasperation, attempts to escape, and efforts to defend one's living conditions, but essentially without any of this, in the vast majority of cases, translating into a rational indictment of the government or the regime; that is, without the discontent, the concern, or the protest itself becoming politicized.

This was all the more true given that it was evident the government and the PNF were making (and widely publicizing) an effort to alleviate the situation (especially during the winter of '30–'31), and all the more so because, at the same time, many workers realized that in that situation they could still derive some benefit from the fascist organizations—and even this, however small, was always better than nothing.

On the government's part, the greatest effort to mitigate the consequences of the crisis—and unemployment in particular—was made through public works, road construction, railway and waterway projects, building construction, land reclamation, and so on. In this way, the state and local authorities managed to provide employment for a certain number of unemployed people.

We have already mentioned another government initiative from this period; we are referring to the instructions Mussolini issued in the spring of 1930 to streamline and expedite the proceedings of the Labor Courts and, thereby, to achieve a more rapid resolution of collective and, above all, individual labor disputes.

Regarding the widespread distrust among workers toward the Labor Courts due to the extreme slowness of their proceedings and the fact that, in the absence of collective bargaining agreements,

individual disputes could not benefit from the procedural advantages provided for in other cases, Mussolini's attention had already been drawn to this issue by Pietro Capoferri, the leader of the Milanese Fascist labor movement—one of the most serious and perceptive Fascist labor organizers of the time—toward the end of April 1930, in a letter calling for prompt and decisive action.

The decisive factor, however, was that Mussolini, having traveled to Milan and Sesto San Giovanni a month later, was forced to personally observe a widespread indifference among the working class—especially in Sesto San Giovanni—toward the regime and toward him personally.

As Capoferri recalled in his memoirs, in Sesto San Giovanni, Mussolini addressed the workers on current political and social issues.

Despite his effective oratory and his distinctly progressive statements, the crowd of workers and office employees remained silent: applause was limited to the Fascists and the leaders lined up in front of the Duce's podium.

"Deeply disappointed," Mussolini immediately after the speech wanted to discuss the labor situation with Capoferri. Here is how Capoferri recounted the conversation:

I took the opportunity to point out to him that the mood expressed by those workers had been an act of sincerity and reflected a situation of general chaos… I pointed out that the authorities responsible for maintaining public order continued to perpetuate the error of viewing the law as serving solely to punish work stoppages with the penalties it prescribed, without ever bothering to investigate the causes that had led to them or to take action against those responsible.

I emphasized that it was urgent to remove the obstacles that rendered the law ineffective, both in letter and in spirit, if we truly wished to eradicate from the hearts of the masses the conviction that it was nothing more than an instrument of repression.

I pointed out that what had been achieved in the area of collective bargaining and dispute resolution was due, in large part, to the goodwill and understanding of those industrialists who, out of a sense of humanity or political awareness, were convinced that the principles of class collaboration required an equal understanding of workers' rights. I observed that when the unions were faced with outright refusals or pretexts for rejection—whether during contract negotiations or the resolution of labor disputes—regarding their most equitable demands, they could not find in the law the means to ensure justice prevailed, due to the procedures set forth in the regulations that had rendered them ineffective and the failure of the judiciary to function properly.

Local organizations—that is, those in direct contact with the masses—were often sidelined by procedural maneuvers designed to drag out disputes, with easy recourse to minutes of failure to reach agreement, to begin the arduous process of review at the level of national unions or federations—from

which one could extricate oneself with yet another record of failure to reach agreement—until the matter was finally brought before the Confederation or the Ministry. This procedure required months and months of time.

In short, I was able to prove that not only was the functioning of the unions being paralyzed, but—whether in good or bad faith—the very law that was supposed to steer the conflicts between employers and workers toward a peaceful and legal resolution was being stripped of its ethical substance and its political, moral, and social value.

Mussolini was deeply surprised by this presentation, which stood in stark contrast to his convictions and to the directives he had repeatedly issued regarding justice in the sensitive area of labor contract regulations… [and] he asked me, in his usual concise manner, what measures—in my opinion—would be necessary to address the serious shortcomings that had been reported… I therefore proposed:

1. that the labor courts be made fully operational through the creation of separate divisions within the district courts and magistrates' courts, staffed by specialized judges who, in the exercise of this mandate, would be able to acquire specific experience and expertise;

2. to authorize labor unions to establish dedicated legal offices staffed by attorneys permanently employed by the unions, with the aim of:

a) ensure that workers, in both collective and individual disputes, receive free legal assistance from the union, which could easily draw on the resources provided by mandatory union dues to provide this service;

b) ensure the union's presence in legal proceedings;

3. An amendment to regulations and procedural practices to grant local organizations the authority to bring cases before the courts without being required to seek the opinion of national organizations, thereby eliminating the causes of most of the grievances reported.

Mussolini agreed with and approved these proposals…

We have dwelled on the Mussolini-Capoferri meeting because it essentially summarizes the entire set of measures that, beginning in the spring of 1930, were taken regarding labor union matters—first in Milan and Lombardy, then in almost all of the rest of Italy; and because these measures not only led to a certain improvement in the overall situation (both because the time required to resolve disputes was indeed significantly shortened and, above all, because, in this new climate, on the one hand, workers gained confidence in the labor courts and turned to them more frequently, and, on the other hand, many employers, who until then had taken advantage of the slowness and, often, the inconclusiveness of legal proceedings, proved less intransigent and preferred to find mutually agreed-upon solutions through provincial labor unions), but also a significant increase in workers' trust in the unions (and thus in the regime); This increase in trust, in turn, restored to Fascist trade unionism—which had been on the defensive for several years and was increasingly unable to preserve its autonomy of action from government interference—a certain self-confidence and, consequently, a somewhat greater margin of autonomy and influence.

Very soon, within a few months—as Capoferri wrote—there were clear, favorable signs from the masses toward the unions, and confidence in the institutions charged with protecting workers' interests began to spread, amid an atmosphere of hopeful anticipation for the resolution of the most serious problems."

This new climate of general confidence—which, on the one hand, sparked enthusiasm among organizers, who felt more encouraged in carrying out their duties, and, on the other, fostered a sense of hopeful anticipation among the masses—facilitated the strengthening of the bond between workers and unions.

The gradual increase in union membership confirms Capoferri's assessment and testimony, even though, undoubtedly, a portion of the new memberships was driven by the greater chances that unionized workers had of finding new employment in the event of layoffs, compared to non-unionized workers.

On the other hand, a close examination of union activity from the second half of the 1930s onward reveals a notable resurgence, particularly among blue-collar workers and especially in Central and Northern Italy. The manifestations of this resurgence are varied, just as numerous and significant are the echoes of it that can be detected even in the clandestine communist press, in the news it reported, and especially in the discussions regarding whether or not communists should join fascist unions and make use of the tools these unions could offer them to advance their penetration among the workers.

Among the former, the following are particularly noteworthy: in addition to a general revival of internal union activity (meetings, discussions—some quite lively—as well as regional and sector-specific conferences) and a certain return to forms of internal democracy (which took concrete form in the second half of 1934 in the new charter of the Fascist Confederation of Industrial Workers, which no longer provided for top-down appointments, but rather the election of leaders from the rank and file), the de facto reappearance in major industrial firms of factory representatives (and there were even some attempts, for example in the Modena area, to establish village representatives) who were very often appointed by the workers themselves and, above all, greater determination and firmness in opposing employers' choices and decisions regarding reductions in employment and wages, the

fragmentation of wages, the setting of piecework rates, and the restructuring of work and job categories; greater determination and firmness which, in numerous cases, succeeded—if not in preventing, then at least in reducing and containing—the employers' tendency toward a gradual erosion of wage levels and increased exploitation of labor, and, above all, served as a prelude to the recovery in wages and labor standards that, as mentioned, followed the termination, on October 1, 1935, by the Fascist Confederation of Industrial Workers of the agreement signed in April of the previous year 2.

From this perspective, it becomes clear how Mussolini—who in 1927 had been forced to acknowledge that the industrial proletariat was "for the most part still distant [from the regime], and, if no longer as opposed as before, then indifferent"—came to assert in October 1934: "The masses of Italian workers, from 1929 to the present, have drawn closer to the Fascist revolution."

With what we have said, we believe we have provided—albeit only in broad strokes—an idea of the general conditions and the prevailing attitude toward the fascist regime among the working masses between the end of 1929 and the end of 1934.

If one attempts to conduct the same type of analysis for the rest of Italian society, not only does the overall picture remain unchanged, but those elements are further accentuated which, at the beginning of this chapter, led us to assert that the period in question corresponded to the years of the regime's greatest popular support in the country.

Undoubtedly, the effects of the crisis were felt at all levels of the social hierarchy; however, it is equally certain that, as one moved up the social ladder, these effects were less painful, both because they were less severe (for example, salary cuts for white-collar workers rarely exceeded those officially established in 1930 and 1934, and, in any case, this did not apply to civil servants), and because those affected generally had greater financial leeway to cope with them and make them more bearable, as well as—at the highest rungs—adequate means to shift part of the burden onto those occupying the lower rungs or onto the state.

At the lower-middle levels, hardship, worries, and sometimes discontent were determined above all—in addition to wage cuts—by the delay with which retail prices adjusted (and never actually did so) to them, by declines in agricultural and real estate income, by the difficulties faced by commerce, crafts, and small businesses (the increase in bounced checks and bankruptcies was notable during these years), the scarcity and high cost of money, and above all, the heavy tax burden.

This gave rise to a series of fears and reactions that exacerbated the situation, such as, for example, a certain tendency to withdraw money from banks, to refrain from investing it, to avoid converting it into securities, and, if possible, to attempt to transfer it abroad. Some of these sources of unease and concern (the scarcity and high cost of money, the excessively high tax burden) were also present at the highest levels of society.

At this level, however, the unease and concerns were primarily driven by other factors:

a) Mussolini's unyielding aversion to any sort of monetary maneuvering and—even after the pound abandoned the gold standard—to any idea of devaluing the lira;

b) the view, quite widespread among the industrial class, that the government's policy was too sensitive to agricultural interests;

c) the view—also quite widespread—that the government showed little understanding of the "necessity" for companies to reduce employment and wages and, therefore, tended, on the one hand, not to intervene forcefully against the unions to induce them to adopt a greater "spirit of cooperation" and, on the other hand, to focus excessively on public works projects rather than on a systematic series of more productive investments;

d) the diverse and sometimes conflicting interests that drove the various sectors and thus shaped their specific attitudes toward the government's fundamental policy decisions; Typical in this regard are the conflicts—and thus the discontent—that, in the early stages of the crisis, were sparked by trade and customs policy, the revision of which was sought by the agricultural sector to defend its major crops from foreign competition and was opposed by a large part of the industrial sector, which did not want to abandon the "most-favored-nation" system for fear of exposing their foreign trade to less favorable differential treatment;

e) the periodic resurgence of uncertainties and fears regarding the government's true intentions, as well as mistrust toward possible developments in corporate policy and (in the second phase of the crisis, following the establishment of the IRI) in policies related to industrial bailouts.

In reality—despite these concerns and the recurring discontent they sparked—large-scale industry and the economic sectors linked to it (and, to a lesser extent, the more economically modern and developed agricultural sector) were not only able, on the whole, cope well with the immediate and direct difficulties of the crisis—and to this end were able to benefit from effective and by no means negligible state aid—but they were also able to take advantage of the situation to launch a significant process of restructuring and modernization of the Italian economy and of industry in particular.

A typical example in this regard is the massive increase during the crisis years in initiatives (initially spontaneous, then encouraged, and finally often made mandatory by the government) aimed at establishing—in both agriculture and industry—agreements, mergers, consolidations, and consortia among firms operating in the same sectors, with the aim of coordinating production, regulating prices, controlling the market, and discouraging or even preventing competition.

The immediate and long-term results of this process of restructuring and modernization were certainly not always positive; in some cases, in fact—as Romeo noted—they marked a shift, even in the Italian economy, "toward those forms of oligopoly that are characteristic of the more mature forms of capitalism"; in others, however, they exacerbated certain traditional contradictions of the Italian economy—and in particular of our industry—by limiting its scope for expansion and causing consumers to bear the brunt of the direct benefits.

That said, it must also be noted that while this process did not yield all the positive results it could have for large-scale industry and the economic sectors linked to it, this was not so much due to the government's inability (which, in fact, during the years of the actual crisis implemented an economic policy that, on the whole—apart from the labor union sector—made use of the same tools employed by other capitalist countries[3]) or because of a deliberate choice to the contrary (which, as will be seen, occurred only in part and, in any case, was belated and unsystematic, determined more by a series of circumstances and individual decisions, each dictated by contingent necessities), but rather due to the conflicting interests among certain sectors and, above all, to the short-sightedness and—to quote Abrate — "the poverty of imagination and excessive caution" of the entrepreneurs themselves, who, essentially, were unable either to take or to suggest to the government initiatives that were truly their own and, by limiting themselves to requesting more or less indiscriminate aid and bailouts, ended up

reducing themselves to a state of ever-increasing political inferiority.

What we have been saying must in no way lead one to believe that the difficulties faced by all segments of Italian society during the years of the Great Depression had more pronounced political repercussions in an anti-fascist sense among the middle classes and the upper middle class than those—as we have seen—they had among the working masses.

It would, in fact, be profoundly mistaken to ascribe political significance to the unease, concerns, and discontent that were spreading during those years even among the middle and upper strata of Italian society.

With the exception of specific cases—which were quantitatively insignificant and essentially limited to certain intellectual circles unrelated to fascism— the "Great Crisis" either had no influence whatsoever on the political attitude of this segment of Italian society or, if it did have an influence, it was in the sense that it helped to draw even closer to the regime that part of the bourgeoisie—which constituted the overwhelming majority—that in previous years had either joined the regime, moved closer to it, or, more or less passively, endured it.

From this perspective, those who best grasped the reality in Italy at the time were not the classic anti-fascist democratic émigrés—the groups that had founded the Paris Concentration—who, on more than one occasion—drawing precisely on the echoes of this unease, these concerns, and this discontent—believed in the possibility that bourgeois support for the regime's policies and for fascism was cracking and might even enter a crisis, but rather the Communists, who—as early as 1931, through the words of Giorgio Amendola—stated in no uncertain terms that "the bourgeoisie" was entirely united behind fascism and Giustizia e Libertà.

Amendola's statement, if subjected to in-depth criticism, is certainly too drastic and politically biased.

In fact, with this statement, the Communists sought to deny any validity to democratic and liberal anti-fascism, to effectively erase it from Italian reality, and to reduce the anti-fascist struggle to an exclusive opposition between the bourgeoisie = fascism and the proletariat = communism.

It is no coincidence that during this same period, G. Amendola also published in *Lo Stato operaio* the famous article "With the Proletariat or Against the Proletariat?", which, after harshly attacking non-communist anti-fascism and, in particular, Benedetto Croce ("having remained in Italy, he uses his great personal influence over all of Italy's intellectual youth—bound to him by their idealist education, by his great example of scientific rigor, and by his continuous work as a scholar—to prevent the radical approach to the anti-fascist struggle from reaching its logical revolutionary conclusion"), concluded with this final exhortation:

This is the moment when men of struggle must take their stand: either on the side of the bourgeoisie, in defense of a rotten and corrupt system, no longer capable of resolving even the most basic problems of civil life, allied with fascism and social-fascism, or on the side of the proletariat in defense of the first proletarian democracy, in defense of Russia, for the establishment in Italy of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which, by relentlessly crushing the forces of reaction, will carry out the only true "anti-fascist revolution"—the only one capable of providing a progressive, liberal solution to the fundamental problems of Italian life. One side or the other: a decision must be made… All those who

have grasped these truths must know that there is a place for them on the proletarian-peasant front of the anti-fascist revolution.

If one does not take it literally and strips it of its contingent political significance—that is, if one firmly holds to the point that the antifascist opposition in Italy was not only the Communist one, but was also —and perhaps even more so—the democratic and liberal one— the Communist assertion that at that time “the Italian bourgeoisie” was united behind fascism is, however, undoubtedly—as an assessment of the dominant attitude among the overwhelming majority of both the middle classes and the bourgeoisie proper—to be fully accepted.

It is no coincidence that essentially similar assessments can be found—albeit with a slight delay—in the *Quaderni di Giustizia e Libertà* as well, written both by exiles such as E. Lussu and by activists living in Italy.

Highly significant, for example, is what Augusto Monti (Venturio) wrote in the *Quaderni* (December 1932):

“The entire bourgeoisie supports fascism,” said Tirreno in his article “Orientamenti” in the June ’32 issue of *Quaderni*. Very true. The arguments put forward by Tirreno are absolutely persuasive; most persuasive of all is this: even where “fascist terror” does not operate—that is, abroad—the Italian bourgeoisie stands with fascism.

I expand on this argument and say: even at home, without the “terror,” the bourgeoisie—the entire bourgeoisie—is in fact on the side of fascism. Fascism has not exercised “terror” against the bourgeois classes, but only against the lower classes… That these bourgeois—and perhaps all bourgeois—might speak ill of fascism in private is another matter, both specific to them and more general in nature.

And since I have spoken of anti-fascist bourgeois, I want to tell the whole truth about them once and for all. There is one thing that the Italian anti-fascist bourgeois hates above all else, and that is fascism; but there is another thing that the anti-fascist bourgeois in Italy fears above all else, and that is the fall of fascism. Systematically, from 1924 until yesterday, every time the fascist regime was—or seemed to be—in danger, these people, when faced with the choice between fascism and its antagonist—whether within themselves or even outside themselves—have always chosen fascism: “Better fascism than the Aventine,” they said in 1924; “Better fascism than the Catholics,” they said in 1931; when nothing imminent threatens their hated-yet-beloved master, they always have the refuge and consolation of saying, “Better fascism than communism.”

Nor, for that matter, should the validity of these assessments, on closer inspection, come as a surprise. Apart from the fact that we now know that during the years of the "Great Crisis," conservative and authoritarian tendencies strengthened throughout Central and Western Europe, it is in fact difficult to imagine that the Italian bourgeoisie could have lost faith in Fascism or even felt compelled to distance itself from it precisely at a time when—to quote H. Stuart Hughes— "the great democracies of Western Europe appeared ailing, and no one knew what remedy might cure them," the future looked bleak and uncertain, and the severity of the crisis could have raised fears of social unrest and tensions—which, in reality, were everywhere less severe than feared but which certainly served as a decisive deterrent to even the mere prospect of political change at that moment.

Furthermore, even setting aside the fears aroused by the crisis, the desire—increasingly strong in those circumstances—for order and internal stability, and the need for government aid, there was a widespread conviction, even among those who personally would have welcomed a non-revolutionary return to a regime of freedom, that "once a regime has been established for ten years, it is futile to delude oneself into thinking it can be shaken and overthrown".

The same argument applies to the middle classes, who, above all, still represented the segment of Italian society most heavily influenced by fascism—or, at the very least, most heavily influenced by the regime's mass propaganda (all of which was aimed at portraying the Italian situation as, despite everything, far better than that of other countries, to extol the measures and "successes" of Fascism, and to tout the "recognition" it received from abroad, even from influential figures in democratic countries), and were more readily inclined to find psychological compensation and catharsis—both individual and collective—for the difficulties of the moment.

Significant in this regard, for example, is the enthusiasm—more nationalistic than purely sporting—aroused by the individual and collective achievements in Italian sports and technology during these years, and in particular those most directly linked to the regime, such as Italo Balbo's great transatlantic flights.

Finally, one cannot underestimate the impact that certain very important events—particularly among intellectual groups and, more specifically, among the younger generation—had during this period on the attitude toward fascism held by segments of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie.

Italian culture during the regime's heyday has been the subject, over the past twenty-five years, of stances and even heated controversies, during which there has been much discussion—in relation to it—of "culture" and "non-culture," of "faults," "limitations," and "merits," of "commitment" and "disengagement," of "escapism" (for example, among writers, in hermeticism), "delegating political engagement to politicians in exchange for the autonomy of pure culture for intellectuals," and so on.

All these discussions were conducted primarily from an immediately ideological-political perspective rather than on the basis of specific studies and analyses—whether of groups, journals, or cultural institutions, or by sector (by disciplines, subjects, or "genres")—which are still extremely scarce and which, on the contrary, appear increasingly indispensable both for obtaining an accurate picture of Italian culture during those years, and to avoid reducing the overall discourse to schematizations—not merely generic ones, but those based on a distorting generalization of situations, experiences, and significant cases (which were not always significant at the time, since they often found their meaning in developments following the crisis, if not the outright collapse, of Fascism)—that are particular and,

therefore, not generalizable.

Virtually nothing, however, has been done to situate the culture of the regime's years within the framework of the fascist "political system"—that is, its capacity to extract and regulate, to use Almond's terminology, the "demands" emanating from the society of the time and, thus, to socialize the intellectuals.

In other words, virtually nothing has been done toward studying culture as an institution of the regime—an institution in which, more than its content (at least until that content exceeded a certain "threshold," which, moreover, was not always the same and lowered over time, in parallel with the regime's increasing totalitarianism and the sclerosis of fascist ideology, and, therefore, as the regime's ability to channel consent—and, in particular, the "questions" raised by intellectuals—without coercion diminished), its integration and its role within the fabric of Italian society as a factor in organizing, first and foremost, young people and, more broadly, intellectuals (taking this definition in its broadest sense).

The only serious attempt in this direction to date is a paper on the socialization of young people under the Fascist and Francoist regimes presented in 1968 by G. Germani at a symposium held in the United States on single-party political systems.

At the conclusion of his analysis, the author identified four developmental stages in young people's attitudes toward fascism:

The first stage corresponds to the period of struggle to establish the regime. During this period, the level of political engagement among young people is naturally higher than normal (relative to the prevailing level in each national political culture), and the population (including young people) will be strongly aligned either in favor of or against the nascent fascist movement.

In the second stage, once the regime has consolidated its power and the first generations politically socialized within the new order are emerging, the propensity for political engagement will tend to be much lower, and in fact, depoliticization may prevail. At this level of power, the regime will be wary of creating a loyal and dynamic elite. Instead, it will increasingly recruit bureaucrats and young people motivated solely by personal ambition.

In the third stage, while efforts are made to recreate the movement's original "spirit" in order to provide new motivation for the loyal and active support of young people, politically engaged youth will tend toward some form of deviationism.

Finally, in the fourth stage, as people realize once again that the regime cannot be changed from "within," the minority of politically active young people will turn increasingly toward total rejection and active opposition to the system.

Despite its generalizing intent, in our view this framework proposed by Germani corresponds quite well to the reality of the Italian case and finds in it even more numerous and significant confirmations than those on which its author based his elaboration; and it finds them both in the journalism of the time—particularly that related to the discussion of the so-called "youth problem," which was one of the central themes of the Fascist press in the 1930s and which Germani, in particular, used to support his assertions; both in subsequent memoirs (historiography, on the other hand, is less useful in this regard, as—with the sole exception of Santarelli—it has dealt with the "youth problem" only briefly); and, furthermore, in archival documentation (both police and party records).

If we accept this framework, there is no doubt that all the evidence at our disposal leads us to place the period of interest here in the transitional phase between the second and third stages; a phase, therefore, that shared characteristics of both these stages, even though, on the one hand, those of the second stage were by then tending to be supplanted by those of the third and, on the other hand, the latter—not yet having fully materialized—did not, for the time being, give rise to the fundamental contradictions that would characterize the full maturity of the third stage and determine the transition to the subsequent and final one.

These contradictions were captured with great subtlety by Germani in a passage worth bearing in mind, with reference both to the period from 1929 to 1934—when the groundwork for them was being laid—and to the subsequent period—roughly until 1941 or 1942—when they shaped the attitudes of ever-wider segments of the youth:

To ensure the regime's continuity, the party encouraged the creative participation of young people and promoted the emergence of a genuine political elite (that is, not merely a bureaucracy of social climbers); the fundamental mechanisms used for this purpose comprised two main elements.

On the one hand, there was the hope for a "social" evolution of the regime in terms of social justice and drastic changes in the economic sphere; on the other, there was the promise made to the younger generations that they would play an innovative role through criticism, the "circulation of ideas," and a genuine transformation of institutions and people.

But these components—social change and liberalization—were in stark contrast to the regime's fundamental aims. The persistence of its original "raison d'être"—the defense and preservation of the principal vested interests within the existing social system—and the demobilization of the lower classes blocked social change.

Once this possibility was eliminated, any “liberalization” would appear to be a source of dangerous deviations and an immediate obstacle to the regime’s stability; the party’s policy toward young people therefore never managed, throughout its history, to escape this inherent contradiction.

The more successful these dynamic mechanisms were, the more the party was forced to limit or eliminate them. The younger generations subsequently discovered that the promised future did not actually exist and became concerned about these inherent limitations; at that point, their “long journey through fascism” came to an end: passive conformity or open rebellion were the outcomes of this process, and the path chosen depended on the interplay of personal circumstances and external historical conditions.

In the period from 1929 to 1934, however, this process was still in its early stages. The vast majority of young people were either apolitical and thus passively endured fascism, showing no real interest in either it or alternative solutions, and thought only of securing their own future (typical in this regard is the account offered in Alberto Moravia’s *The Indifferent Ones* 2), or—if politicized—was so in a fascist sense; for the purposes of the specific discussion at hand, it matters little whether this was due to mere careerist opportunism and ambition, or to sincere conviction and a desire to help transform the regime and Italian society in a more social and progressive direction—“more fascist,” as they used to say.

What matters here is that, in this situation, during the years 1929–1934, the vast majority of young people—and especially the intellectuals—were also, actively or passively, with Fascism or behind it, not against it; they still had faith in it or were indifferent to it, but without seeking or even showing the slightest interest in other political solutions.

By this we certainly do not mean to deny that the regime found opponents among young people. Undoubtedly, such opponents existed among the young as well; however, for the years in question, one cannot yet speak of a “youth opposition”—that is, an opposition rooted in young people precisely because they were young, having been formed and matured under the fascist regime, and which, therefore, differed both in terms of the particular moral, cultural, political, and psychological experiences of its members, as well as by the political avenues hypothesized—and often actively pursued—by the opposition still active among the older generations: those who were already at the forefront of Italian society when Fascism came to power and established the regime, and those who, even if they had not lived through the crisis and the end of the liberal-democratic state firsthand, had nonetheless been fundamentally shaped morally, culturally, and politically within that very climate.

For the years in question, therefore, the discussion of young people must be practically subsumed into that of intellectuals tout court—that is, into the more general discussion (already outlined in its essential terms) of the various social classes to which young people belonged.

And with this, our discussion returns to the point from which we began—that is, to the issue of the attitude toward the regime held by the so-called world of culture or, if one prefers, by intellectuals in the broadest sense of the term.

Reconstructing this attitude—it goes without saying—presents considerable difficulties.

On the one hand, because “intellectuals” constitute (and, even more so than today, did so in the interwar years) a reality as elusive, diverse, and heterogeneous as any other, with characteristics of its own, yet at the same time subject to manifold social and psychological—as well as cultural—influences, suggestions, and conditioning that are rooted in vastly different environmental contexts and traditions; on the other hand, because, among all the components of modern society, the attitude of “intellectuals” is the most difficult to grasp within an authoritarian political system, which—given its nature—has among its most extreme characteristics that of controlling, limiting, and even preventing the manifestations through which the activity of “intellectuals” —the dissemination of their ideas through speech and writing—might take on or even merely hint at a meaning of opposition or criticism of the system itself, might propose alternative solutions to it on ideological and political grounds, and, above all, might create obstacles to the education and socialization of the younger generations.

That said, in our view, it is nevertheless possible to identify at least two very important underlying issues in an effort to reconstruct the attitude of “intellectuals.”

The first concerns the need to draw a clear distinction between the lower, more peripheral levels of the intellectual microcosm and the higher levels, which are essentially identified with high culture, whether academic or not.

The former certainly had no shortage of reasons for discontent, concern, and criticism of the regime, just as there were certainly more or less committed opponents among them; in the vast majority of cases, however, these “intellectuals” behaved politically in the same way as the social community to which they belonged and into which they were fully integrated; and, very often, precisely because they were “intellectuals,” they were inclined to exaggerate and act as spokespeople for the dominant attitudes within these communities.

They were, therefore, very often fascists; they were members of the PNF and provided it with a significant number of cadres, especially at the peripheral levels, but also at the central levels.

At the highest levels, the situation was undoubtedly different. Fascists and pro-Fascists (often of a conservative, nationalist, or Gentilean persuasion) were numerous here as well, but alongside them there was no shortage of critics and staunch opponents, nor, above all, those who, despite being part of the social and political establishment, were led by their cultural background to adopt toward the regime an attitude of detached adherence—critical in its own way—which, from an immediately political standpoint, often amounted to a sort of impatience with the regime’s lack of “style,” with the crudeness and ignorance of so many party leaders, the careerism and bureaucratic-military herd mentality rampant within the party and its affiliated organizations, the lack of restraint and “good taste” in propaganda, and the detrimental and corrupting effects of the often unsolicited displays of boisterous and fanatical exaltation of the regime and the Duce by some of their colleagues, etc.

From another perspective—namely, that of their conduct and their status as men of culture—this attitude of detached adherence often translated into a sort of individual resistance to these detrimental aspects of fascist society and, in particular, into a commitment to cultural integrity and to not “compromising” in terms of scientific honesty and rigor, which—especially when their work involved contact with young people—while it may not have had immediate political value, nevertheless had the immense merit of setting an example and a standard of comparison, and of helping to shape young people capable of understanding the universal and liberal value of culture and, therefore, of deriving from it a standard for living and, where appropriate, even for political judgment.

Truly significant in this regard is a statement found in the aforementioned PS report of May 19, 1931, on the situation at the University of Turin:

The distinguished luminary of philosophical science who holds the chair at this university delivers lectures that are entirely correct from every point of view; nor, given his high social standing, his merits, his undisputed Italian identity, and his proven patriotism, is a figure against whom not the slightest criticism can be leveled; yet, as a result of his teaching of philosophy, the students' political consciousness is shaped in a manner decidedly opposed to the postulates and methods of the Regime.

The second issue that must be clarified, if one wishes to attempt to reconstruct and historically understand the attitude of the "intellectuals" during the period under consideration here, concerns the degree of control over culture exercised by the regime between 1929 and 1934.

Mussolini had a dual attitude toward culture—especially during these years. On the one hand—as we saw in the previous chapter—he loved to present himself as a man of culture and to maintain contacts and relationships with the most prominent intellectuals, toward whom he did not fail, at times, to show himself to be understanding and liberal. On the other hand, his conception of culture was essentially instrumental and therefore, fundamentally illiberal.

Culture, at all its levels and in all its manifestations and organizations, had for him an eminently political value and significance: it was to contribute to the prestige of Italy and of Fascism both at home and abroad and, at the same time, was to serve the education of the younger generations in the manner intended by the regime.

In light of this underlying conception, we must view and evaluate both the major cultural initiatives and achievements of Fascism—such as, to limit ourselves to the best-known and most important ones, the moral and material support for the publication of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* and the founding of the Accademia d'Italia—and the relative freedom granted to those in charge of some of these initiatives to draw upon, for the sake of their success, even non-Fascist scholars—and, in some cases, even those known as moderate anti-Fascists—as well as—especially during the years in question—the apparent inconsistency in the regime's modus operandi with regard to the world of culture: at times patronizing and generous with honors and sinecures, at other times almost liberal or, at least, reluctant to intervene in ways that might have proved counterproductive in terms of prestige (significant in this regard is the course of action taken toward B. Croce, whom it allowed to continue publishing *La critica* undisturbed), and at other times—especially when dealing with cultural figures in direct contact with young people—it took actions that could be interpreted as acts of weakness on the part of the regime, which was drastically authoritarian and repressive.

A typical example of this is the requirement imposed, toward the end of 1931, on university professors to take an oath of loyalty to the king and the fascist regime and to refrain from belonging to associations and parties "incompatible" with them.

For the regime's practical purposes, the oath was virtually useless: the professors who refused to take it (more as a matter of principle than, in many cases, out of outright anti-fascism) and chose to leave teaching numbered fewer than twenty out of more than 1,200, and among those who took the oath, there were numerous non-fascists or anti-fascists who felt they should not abandon their mission as teachers and should not leave the field completely open to fascist politicking; Furthermore, the measure was politically counterproductive, especially abroad, where it was exploited by the anti-fascist émigré community against the regime and created an impression that was anything but favorable even in circles sympathetic to fascism; nevertheless, it was imposed, on the one hand, because at that moment Mussolini felt the need to offer a sop and, at the same time, as an indirect polemical response to the fascist hardliners who, for some time, had begun to accuse the regime of excessive tolerance and even deference toward anti-fascist intellectuals; and, on the other hand, to demonstrate to the Church (the measure was taken in the wake of the dispute over Catholic Action) that even Catholics had to obey the fascist state.

That said, it is important to note, however, that until 1934–35, the regime's pressure on high culture—despite isolated incidents to the contrary, which were indicative of a trend but which many at the time believed were caused more by the "political" anti-fascism of those who were its victims than by a deliberate intent on the part of the regime to assert a rigid "militant" cultural agenda— but rather by the "political" anti-fascism of those who were its victims—was, on the whole, kept at a relatively tolerable level, certainly not comparable to the intensity it reached in subsequent years and—most importantly for the purposes of our discussion—to what was occurring in Germany during the final phase of the period in question, following the rise to power of National Socialism.

During this period, many cultural journals had already fallen in line, and their pages often featured attacks—sometimes quite harsh—against groups and individual intellectuals accused of failing to understand or resisting the new "values" of fascist culture.

By exercising a certain degree of caution and discretion, and by taking some risks (and sometimes paying the price of editorial revisions), it was not yet impossible for nonconformist magazines to survive and continue to promote a cultural discourse distinct from the dominant one.

To cite a few of the most significant examples, consider *Riforma sociale* and *Cultura* (which were forced to suspend publication in 1935), *Nuova Italia*, *Civiltà moderna*, and—in different fields and to varying degrees—*Rivista di pedagogia*, *Solaria*, and *Saggiatore*.

Around these journals, the cream of "liberal" culture—which refused to bow down or conform—could still gather: the Einaudis, the Russos, the Codignolas, the Ruffinis, the Jannaccones, the Omodeos, the Calogeros, the Banfis, and so on. And within their pages, a "European" and nonconformist modern discourse still circulated, featuring Keynes and psychoanalysis, Joyce and Maria Montessori (with her call for education for peace), and many other authors who were certainly not easy to fit into a fascist framework.

This was certainly no small matter, neither from a cultural nor a personal standpoint, even though, of course, none of these magazines can strictly speaking be considered a magazine of political opposition.

Years ago, A. Carocci accurately captured the significance of these magazines by sketching a brief profile of *Solaria* and its history between 1926 and 1936:

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I do not mean to say that *Solaria*, a literary magazine, engaged in political opposition to the regime, nor even in ideological opposition. That would be to attribute to it merits it did not possess. Rather, much more modestly—and by accepting the isolation to which official literature had relegated it (the readership of *Solaria* was always a handful, and its circulation never reached 700 copies; nor do I recall it ever receiving the honor of being mentioned in the newspapers of the time)—it served, at most, as a catalyst for the development of consciousness.

Official literature celebrated the Italian genius, Italy's primacy, and the glories of the Italian race; yet every page of *Solaria* expressed the conviction that contemporary Italian literature was nothing more than a province of the broader European literary landscape—and not even the most splendid one at that.

Official literature asserted that within Italy lay all the foundations and achievements to which a modern culture could aspire; and *Solaria* humbly acknowledged that the most original expressions of modern literature had flourished elsewhere—whether they were called Proust, Joyce, or Kafka—and affirmed that while Italian writers were indeed voices worthy of consideration, they were part—and only part—of a broader European dialogue.

Unless one has a clear understanding—in addition to the general political context both within the country and internationally—of this particular cultural situation, it is difficult to reconstruct and comprehend the attitude of Italian "intellectuals" in the years between 1929 and 1934, and one very often ends up making judgments that are unfair and historically invalid.

In particular, it is not understood why, during those years, opposition to the regime was relatively limited and confined even among intellectuals, while more widespread—especially in high-culture circles—was an attitude that we might define, on the one hand, as non-opposition and, on the other hand, as largely characterized by two convictions or hopes, depending on the case: that it was possible to preserve culture fromexcessive politicization in the fascist sense and to instill in young people a respect for some of its fundamental values; and that it was not advisable to leave the cultural sphere (and, by extension, at least for some, the political sphere) in the hands of the most intransigent and crude form of fascism, but, on the contrary, that it was advisable to support that part of fascism in which certain cultural values had not been overwhelmed by political commitment.

In this attitude—a minority one, yet quite widespread—within the cultural climate of the time, we can certainly discern a whole series of insights for a broader discussion on the characteristics and limitations of the intellectual class of that era; however, identifying this attitude is indispensable here above all for the purposes of another discussion, one far more important for understanding the reality of the time: that concerning the attitude and role played, during this period but also in the years that followed, throughout the entire duration of the regime, Benedetto Croce and the "Critica" group—both as a political and cultural opposition to Fascism with its own distinct character and activities, and as a point of reference, whether consciously or not, for those intellectuals who were neither fascists nor

anti-fascists—whom we have mentioned—whose position and, above all, subsequent evolution in the second half of the 1930s was largely influenced and at times determined precisely by the existence of this point of reference, almost as a sort of moral and cultural conscience.

It is well known that few figures in our democratic anti-fascist movement—certainly none of the major ones—were as different in every respect as Croce and Salvemini; equally well known are the controversies that flared up on several occasions between these two men, especially at Salvemini's instigation, as he was a critic of Croce who was as lively as he was often unfair.

Yet it is precisely to Salvemini that we owe the assessment of Croce's anti-fascism—and above all of the Neapolitan philosopher's role during the years of the regime—that is not only more balanced and free from suspicion of bias, but also historically more valid.

"Italians," Salvemini wrote in February 1946 during a heated controversy against Croce, "should never forget the gratitude they owe to Croce for his resistance to fascism from 1925 to 1943."

Every other voice in Italy was silenced in prisons, placed under house arrest, or forced into exile. His very silence was a protest. Resistance and silence came from the stratosphere, no doubt. But their effect was powerful. Many young people were comforted by his teachings and his example to believe in freedom, even though each understood freedom in their own way and in forms that Croce did not approve of.

But what mattered was that this freedom was not fascism. What mattered was that Mussolini encountered as much invincible resistance as possible, even if it was passive. Much of this resistance stemmed from Croce's teachings and example. This credit belongs to him, and no one should forget it even today, when it is necessary to disagree with him.

Within the scope of the discussion at hand, any commentary on this assessment is essentially superfluous. What is more important is to hear, in the words of Croce himself—specifically, from a letter he wrote in early 1928—how he understood his role in Italy under fascism:

"The truth," he wrote to G. Lombardo Radice, "is that in times of calm, practitioners attend to their practice and scholars to their studies. In times of crisis, practitioners lose their way or are eliminated; and scholars assume the role of critics and educators for the future."

As in the previous case, any commentary here is superfluous. It is better to limit ourselves, on the one hand, to examining whether and how Croce adapted his actions to this conviction and this program of his, and, on the other hand, to assessing what the fruits of such actions were.

The answer to the first question is as straightforward as it is certain: throughout the entire duration of the regime, Croce consistently aligned his personal conduct and his interventions—whether private or public, in Italy or abroad—with a twofold and very specific aim: to avert paralysis and corruption—which would ultimately prove fatal, resulting from the isolation, conformism, and politicization imposed on them by fascism; and to offer Italian culture—and above all to young people—an example, a lesson, and a voice that were, as far as possible, capable of providing a critical and alternative perspective to the official narratives—in short, the essential elements for an autonomous education in moral and intellectual freedom and in the spiritual values of true culture. In this sense, it can be said that—precisely during the years in question—the "manifesto" of the opposition, of Croce's resistance to fascism, was the speech Croce delivered at Oxford on September 3, 1930, on the occasion of the Seventh International Congress of Philosophy, and which he published shortly thereafter in *Critica*.

In it, in fact, all the essential elements of Croce's discourse during the years of the regime are set forth with extreme clarity and courage, and his condemnation of modern anti-historicism—the irrationalist rejection of historicity—takes on the character of an explicit condemnation of fascism:

> … today's anti-historicism is nothing but unbridled selfishness or harsh authoritarianism; it seems to celebrate an orgy or a satanic cult… Today's anti-historicism, therefore, seems not to be a reversal and a negative symbol of a new soundness, but rather mental impoverishment, moral weakness, heresy, despair, neurosis, and, in short, an infirmity to be overcome with patience and perseverance, like all infirmities.

> Confirmation of this nature of infirmity can be found in another phenomenon that, together with anti-historicism, we observe—and which is intrinsically one and the same with it: the decline of the liberal ideal, which in some countries has even led to the formation of illiberal regimes, but which is evident almost everywhere in words and deeds, in books and political methods, and even more so in restless desires.

> Historical sentiment and liberal sentiment are, in truth, inseparable, so much so that no better definition of history could be given than "the history of freedom," for it is only through this that history acquires meaning and only through these that it becomes intelligible. Undoubtedly, history also reveals theocratic regimes, authoritarian regimes, regimes of violence, reactionary movements, counter-reforms, and dictatorships; yet what alone and always re-emerges, unfolds, and grows is freedom—which at times shapes its means from those various forms, at times bends them to its own purposes, and at times uses its apparent defeats as stimuli for its own life… For us, as historians, historicism—which means civilization and culture—is the value entrusted to us, and we have a duty to defend, uphold, and expand it: the historian is the link between the past and the future, a guarantee of the integrity of the new that is emerging—blasphemy as freedom—but which, as freedom, always proves right against those who oppose it.

Along these lines (as confirmed, indirectly but significantly, both by the attacks launched against him by the fascists and their most intransigent or politically crude and naive Catholic supporters, and by the attempts—at least for a certain period—by some sectors of the more prudent and politically astute fascism—such as the "Critica fascista" group —aimed at reabsorbing certain aspects of his thought into a fascist framework). Croce's major historical works published during these years, and, more consistently, *La critica*, fall squarely within this tradition—both through Croce's own contributions and those of his other collaborators, especially the most committed and assiduous among them, and in particular G. De Ruggiero and A. Omodeo.

However significant the role of works such as *Storia d'Italia* and *Storia d'Europa* may have been, we must not forget that the primary tool through which the Crocean group (a group that was actually less homogeneous than it appeared—as demonstrated by its split during the final years of Fascism and the very early years of the post-Fascist era—but which, at the time, was cemented by a shared conviction of the absolute necessity to carry forward the political and cultural battle they had undertaken at any cost) operated most effectively was above all *La critica*; thanks to the journal, the group was, in fact, able to carry out that continuous work of criticism and cultural clarification, which was indispensable:

… to keep the bond with readers alive and provide them with a constant point of reference so they could stay informed and assess what was gradually unfolding in the Italian and international cultural spheres.

From the same underlying perspective, finally, the numerous private interventions through which Croce, during the same period, strove to encourage and guide the publishing activities of the Laterza publishing house—which, during the years of the regime, was in practice always aligned with the positions of the Crocean group and actively supported its cultural initiatives—as well as individual men of culture and young people taking their first steps on the path of scholarship and ethical-political commitment, must also be viewed and evaluated; not to mention his interventions regarding the 1931 requirement for university professors to take an oath: when asked for advice on how to respond to this demand by various professors who were repelled by the idea of taking an oath, Croce—as is well known—in keeping with the course of action he had chosen, suggested that they coolly assess the consequences of the choice they were about to make and, above all, those that would result from a possible surrender to the fascist and clerical-fascist monopoly on education—that is, their most immediate opportunity for contact with the younger generations.

As for the second question—the one concerning the fruits of this endeavor—everyone—even the most staunch critics of Croce and his cultural role during the second quarter of our century—now agrees that the overall assessment is decidedly positive. Moreover, this is also clearly evident from the assessments

of the time, from those of the people who, thanks to the guidance of Croce's circle, found their path in those years as men of culture and free men (and it matters little whether, then or later, some of them moved toward ideological, cultural, and political solutions that were not Croce's own, because what truly matters is the fact that, if they were able to reach that point, it was thanks to the liberating influence of Croce's teaching), from the assessments—venomous or concerned, depending on the case—of the fascists, and from those of people who, from an entirely different and antithetical political-cultural perspective, were already striving even then to wrest bourgeois and youth antifascism from Croce's "cultural hegemony."

Truly significant, in this latter sense, is what A. Gramsci wrote to his sister-in-law from prison on April 25, 1932:

While so many people are losing their minds and floundering amid apocalyptic sentiments of intellectual panic, Croce becomes a point of reference from which to draw inner strength, thanks to his unshakable certainty that evil cannot prevail metaphysically and that history is rationality. We must also bear in mind that to many, Croce's thought does not present itself as a massive philosophical system that is difficult to assimilate as such. It seems to me that Croce's greatest quality has always been his ability to circulate his conception of the world—without pedantry—through a whole series of short writings in which philosophy presents itself immediately and is absorbed as common sense. Thus, the solutions to many issues end up circulating anonymously, finding their way into newspapers and everyday life, resulting in a large number of "Croceans" who are unaware that they are such—and who may not even know that Croce exists.

From what we have been saying, one thing should be clear: the profound difference that existed in Italy between 1929 and 1934 between the position of B. Croce and the group gathered around *La Critica* and that of the rest of the intellectual world—not only, of course, the fascist or openly supportive faction, but also that part of it which, as has been noted, still maintained a stance of non-opposition toward the regime during this period, without, however, fully accepting its policies, especially as they pertained to culture.

Compared to these positions, that of the Crocean group was the only one that was clearly anti-fascist and that translated into concrete acts of opposition—immediately cultural and, by extension, political.

At this point, to conclude our overview of the attitudes toward the regime held by the various classes and sectors of the bourgeoisie, all that remains is to discuss the more strictly political anti-fascist opposition and its penetration and presence throughout the country.

Regarding the internal opposition throughout the regime's duration, B. Croce expressed a very clear and precise judgment in 1946.

Speaking of Carlo Rosselli and Giustizia e Libertà (which he defined as "the sole doctrinal product of the Italian emigration"), he drew a clear distinction between the opposition abroad, among the émigrés, and that operating domestically, in Italy.

Regarding the former, he offered a largely critical assessment, denying that—given the conditions under which it had to operate—it had succeeded "in devising and carrying out effective political action"; regarding the latter, however, his judgment was quite different: "Far more important and fruitful was the Italian opposition within the country, where the pulse of the people was taken daily, where every day something—however small—was done against the oppressor, and where every day one could work to preserve as much as possible of Italian tradition, civilization, and culture, preparing for the resurgence and—however near or far it might be—a better future."

This latter assessment is undoubtedly positive, but in Croce's writing it inevitably took on a very particular significance; indeed, it is difficult to imagine that, in formulating it, the philosopher was not thinking primarily of—and referring essentially to—his own group and the opposition of intellectuals in general, thereby implying a sort of identification between this particular opposition and opposition to fascism tout court.

The question that arises is therefore clear: even when limited solely to the bourgeois circles of the time, is it possible to consider this assessment historically valid?

If we limit our analysis for the moment to the period 1929–1934—what we have termed the "years of consensus"—Croce's assessment is, in our view, essentially valid.

Among the bourgeoisie of the time, there is no doubt that communist penetration and influence were virtually nonexistent, and the very few documented cases almost all fall within a context that, on closer inspection, is precisely the one indicated by Croce.

That is to say, these were young intellectuals—a typical example being G. Amendola—who were disillusioned with the anti-fascist parties and with Croce's "moderation," and who had turned toward Marxism, without, however, managing to truly connect with one another or carry out any genuine organized action, except for joining the Communist Party and working within its émigré or clandestine organizations, which, however, at the bourgeois level, lacked any real capacity for penetration; and if they did have such capacity, it was through the mediation of the Crocean opposition.

As for the democratic anti-fascist parties of the Paris Concentration, their presence was even more limited. The harsh judgment passed on them by G. Amendola ("detached from their bases, incapable of understanding the course of events in Italy, they truly became exiles, people cut off from the reality of Italian life"), though partly one-sided—since it did not take into account the political, moral, and symbolic significance that the Concentration held in the eyes of global democracy—was certainly not wrong—in relation to the internal Italian situation—and is amply confirmed by police documents of the time.

A hint of a resurgence—though again limited to small groups consisting mainly of young intellectuals—occurred only toward the end of the period under consideration here, with the establishment, around mid-1934 in Milan, of the Internal Socialist Center centered on R. Morandi.

Its fruits, however, were reaped in the following years and within a very different international and national context.

Apart from the Communists—who, however, operated almost exclusively among workers and peasants—the only groups in Italy engaged in any significant anti-fascist activity were a few, very small

organizations. Although these groups had, to varying degrees, connections with the Concentrazione (Giustizia e Libertà had even been granted a mandate by it to operate in Italy as early as 1931), in reality operated primarily within the sphere of intellectual groups and individuals who drew inspiration —more from the experiences of Gobetti, Italia Libera, “Non mollare,” etc., than from traditional parties —and relied on methods of struggle different from those typical of the parties that had founded the Concentration. Among these groups, the National Alliance for Freedom, Giovane Italia, and above all Giustizia e Libertà deserve special mention.

Three groups that were different in some respects but connected to one another in various ways, either directly or indirectly.

The National Alliance had a very short life. Founded in Rome in June 1930 by Lauro De Bosis, Mario Vinciguerra, and Renzo Rendi, with the encouragement and assistance of men such as G. A. Colonna di Cesarò, B. Croce, U. Zanotti Bianco, the banker R. Ferlosio, and Father E. Rosa of *Civiltà Cattolica*, and a constitutional monarchist-Catholic platform, its activity was effectively limited to the distribution of nine clandestine circulars, and it was crushed by the end of that same year with the arrest and subsequent conviction of Vinciguerra and Rendi.

De Bosis, who was abroad at the time, escaped arrest. The following year, on October 3, 1931, he flew from France to Rome and dropped a large number of leaflets over the capital, calling on Italians to rally around the National Alliance and urging the king to once again become “the champion of freedom.” On its return flight, however, the plane crashed into the sea.

Giovane Italia was an organization of an entirely different kind: it had a decidedly republican orientation and, at least according to the conclusions reached by the police—who, even in internal documents, attributed to it the planning and execution of a whole series of demonstrative bombings and the famous “Bovone case”—it was not averse to resorting to terrorist methods of struggle. According to some, one of the first groups of Giustizia e Libertà was grafted onto its structure at a certain point in Turin, and perhaps in other locations in northern Italy; it is certain, however, that it had nothing in common with the organization of the same name—which was liberal in orientation and active in 1927–28.

Be that as it may, its influence was practically nonexistent, and its activities—crushed by the police between 1931 and 1932—did more harm than good to the anti-fascist movement, as they provided the regime’s propaganda with an opportunity to accuse it of having reduced itself to terrorism as an end in itself.

For Giustizia e Libertà, the situation is partly different, but partly the same.

It is different with regard to the ethical and political significance that this movement held, especially as articulated by its leader, Carlo Rosselli; in this regard, one need only consider the assessment that—as we have seen—B. Croce gave of it and the contacts that men such as Croce himself, De Ruggiero, and Sturzo had with Giustizia e Libertà.

Furthermore, it is also different in terms of the vitality that Giustizia e Libertà possessed and was able to maintain both in Italy and among the émigré community. On the other hand, at least in part, the situation is the same when referring to the activities that Giustizia e Libertà carried out between 1930 and 1934 in Italy, its ability to gain influence, and above all the practical and political results its activities achieved during this period.

At first, some of Giustizia e Libertà's propaganda initiatives, such as Bassanesi's flight over Milan on July 11, 1930, had a certain political impact; just as there is no doubt that, on an intellectual level, the new movement's political program found some support and succeeded in rallying around Giustizia e Libertà various small groups of non-Communist anti-fascists—the most active and uncompromising among them—who were eager to deepen their struggle against fascism and to establish contacts with the working class as well.

Soon, however—partly out of a thirst for action, partly due to the influence of certain anarchist elements with whom the movement was in contact both in Italy and, above all, among the émigré community, and partly in reaction to the first serious blows dealt to it by the fascist police, Giustizia e Libertà, too, was drawn down the path of sensationalist action and the pursuit of sensational "strikes" that would make an impression on Italian and international public opinion and undermine the myth the regime had built around its police apparatus—in short, down the path of terrorism.

The consequences of this new direction were extremely grave: the positive results were very few, while the negative ones were, on the other hand, very severe.

In fact, on the one hand, it provoked an immediate, frantic counter-response from the police (in 1932, the "Giellist" paranoia within regime circles was such that Mussolini—to whom the musician I. Pizzetti had sent him the libretto of *Orséolo* to read, returned it to him and urged him to avoid the obvious reference to the words "Justice and Freedom" that appeared in a verse), under whose crackdown all the main *Giustizia e Libertà* groups active in Milan, Genoa, Turin, and Rome eventually fell, as well as that of the "neo-Guelph" Catholics who, in Milan, were in contact with them.

On the other hand, it gave fascist propaganda the opportunity to stage a vast and politically highly fruitful campaign against all forms of anti-fascism, accusing it of anarchism and terrorism and citing, in support of this thesis, a whole series of events that, when strung together, were certainly not lacking in drama: on October 24, 1929, in Brussels, F. De Rosa had shot Crown Prince Umberto; on February 3, 1931, in Rome, M. Schirru had been arrested, accused of plotting to assassinate Mussolini; on July 2 of that same year, after two explosive packages addressed to *Popolo d'Italia* had already been intercepted in Milan and the *Corriere della Sera* had already been intercepted in Milan, an explosion occurred at Rome's Tiburtino railway station, killing two railway employees; on November 29, also in 1931, additional explosive material smuggled in from France was discovered in Oneglia; on June 4, 1932, in Rome, another alleged assassin of Mussolini was arrested, A. Sbardellotto, was arrested; and finally, on June 25, 1933, a minor terrorist attack took place in St. Peter's Basilica, also in Rome.

On yet another front, the new direction taken by Giustizia e Libertà ultimately sparked confusion and criticism within the anti-fascist front itself, which, in the long run, had repercussions on the Paris Concentration and contributed to its demise.

In light of this set of facts, and since—apart from those we have mentioned—other opposition activities of any significance during the period 1929–1934 either did not exist at all, or concerned entirely specific situations that could not influence the vast majority of the population, or, if they did influence it, it was in a substantially pro-fascist sense (we refer to the irredentist opposition movements active among the German-speaking minorities in South Tyrol and, above all, the Slavic minorities in the Julian Alps), or they operated on an entirely different plane, and thus cannot be equated with the anti-fascist opposition proper (we refer to certain Catholic circles that we will discuss in the next chapter); in light of this set of facts—we repeat— it is difficult to deny the realistic validity of Croce's

assessment—from which we took our starting point for this brief excursus on non-communist anti-fascism within Italy: it is, in fact, difficult to assert that—from the perspective of effective anti-fascist penetration among the masses and, in particular, among the bourgeoisie—this type of anti-fascist action achieved any real success; in reality, this type of anti-fascism not only came at an extremely high cost, in terms of deaths and arrests, but was confined to small groups and individuals who were already politically committed, without managing to make any substantial inroads beyond them, while at the level of public opinion it either failed to change the situation or actually benefited fascism; precisely the opposite of what the "liberal" opposition of the Crocean type eventually managed to achieve through its daily work of moral and cultural education.

The picture of the Italian situation in the years between the end of 1929 and the end of 1934 can now be considered nearly complete, at least in its most significant aspects and, in particular, to the extent that it serves to provide an overall view of the attitudes of the various segments of Italian society toward the regime. In the next chapter, we will examine what Fascist policy was like during the same period, and we will thus be able to assess the influence it had in further shaping this attitude.

To highlight just one issue by way of example, there is no doubt that, in addition to what has already been said, the regime's significant commitment—both propagandistic and practical—to a policy of intervention and active involvement in the country's economic and social life, and especially in public works and land reclamation, played a far from negligible role in shaping the climate of consensus that developed around the regime during these years: the reclamation of the Agro Pontino and the creation of Littoria and Sabaudia were successes for Mussolini and the regime whose importance must not be underestimated under any circumstances.

Nor can one underestimate the influence that Mussolini's foreign policy—which we will discuss in the fourth chapter—had on the regime's domestic prestige during this same period.

Despite all its contradictions and a certain inherent adventurism (which, incidentally, only rarely came to light and could be perceived by the vast majority of Italians), during these years it was essentially a policy of prestige, but one of peace: that is, the one best suited to gaining popular support. Nor should we underestimate the fact that, while Hitler's rise to power in Germany at the end of January 1933 initially aroused fears and concerns among Italians—including regarding future relations between the two regimes— the caution with which Mussolini conducted himself in his relations with Germany in 1933 and the first half of 1934, and the firmness with which he then confronted the National Socialist designs on Austria in the summer of 1934, met with the unanimous approval—it can certainly be said —of the Italian people.

And not only among the Fascists, their supporters, and the masses socialized and organized by the regime, but also among a large portion of those who, in various ways, were in opposition.

To help understand the extent to which Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the resulting new international situation influenced the attitude of the vast majority of Italians, two small but significant examples seem useful to us.

The first comes from a passage in a letter sent to Mussolini by Luigi Einaudi on July 6, 1933, requesting the revocation of the decision to remove F. Ruffini and himself from the vice presidency and the secretariat of the Royal Historical Society of Turin.

Quite tellingly, he wrote:

The tolerance shown thus far toward the Ruffinis, the Einaudis, and others like them may not, however, have been entirely fruitless. May Your Excellency allow me to explain the reason for this impression of mine. In recent months, in addition to the Four-Party Pact—and, I would say, Your Excellency's speech—another event has greatly enhanced Your Excellency's reputation and that of the government.

Naturally, it has not had as much resonance among the general international public; indeed, for now it is felt only within the narrow circle of academics, writers, and thinkers for whom the pursuit of truth is the sole purpose of life. Though few in number, in the long run they shape the opinion of the masses.

They were scandalized and horrified when they saw what was happening in Germany. And, by contrast, their thoughts turned to Italy. "Hitler's Germany"—to summarize what was read and heard—"is barbarism, it is the Hun horde encamped in
the heart of Europe, it is the darkest Middle Ages revived. Italy is something entirely different. Mussolini does not persecute Jews; he does not fire professors by the hundreds. He has indeed asked them to take an oath, but then leaves them free to hold their own scientific opinions; he does not listen to the fools who call themselves fascists in order to oust harmless scholars accused of being anti-fascists from their positions.

Mussolini does not burn books in public squares and leaves to Hitler the boast of repeating the burning of the Library of Alexandria. He does not purge the academies and respects science."

I do not know the facts well enough to set myself up as a judge of Hitlerism. The fact remains that the opinion of intellectuals around the world now draws a sharp contrast between the two regimes. It is a fact—and this is just one example among many—that Einzig, the author of a recent book on fascism that has been highly praised by the Italian press, felt it necessary—in order not to run up against a wall of distrust created by recent German experience—to assure his English readers that, while he is strongly opposed to Hitlerism, he is, on the other hand, an admirer of Italian fascism, because it is entirely different from the former.

It is also the case that Your Excellency and your government are today receiving particular acclaim from that segment of world public opinion which has always been the most critical and the hardest to win over.

This topic could be explored much more extensively if this were a formal statement rather than a letter,

which is already far too long. Your far-sighted views on international peace and domestic tolerance are certainly not opposed by the elder statesmen, who have stepped aside, but by the petty-minded, who climb on the shoulders of fascism to satisfy ambitions—worthy if justified by merit, but despicable if the goal is reached through exclusions and pretexts—a field in which shrewd tricksters masquerading as jurists have always excelled.

The second example—equally telling, in that it shows how even among the most resolute anti-fascists the idea was now taking hold that fascism, had it known how to play its cards right in foreign policy, might not have fallen after all—is taken from an intelligence report from Paris in which, dated September 2, 1933, a statement by G. E. Modigliani on the international situation and the prospects it might open up for the future of the Fascist regime.

Speaking of Mussolini's attitude toward Hitler, Modigliani reportedly said:

To what extent has he tied himself to Hitler's Germany? Will he follow him toward the inevitable catastrophe, or will he backtrack and turn toward France and England? Will he seize the right moment, or will he arrive too late—when there will be no need for him at all—and thus find himself isolated? If Mussolini follows Hitler at this juncture, the fate of Italian fascism is sealed; if he abandons him to his fate and turns toward France and England, he may be saved.

We will return to all these issues at length in the coming chapters. However, we wanted to mention them here to provisionally complete the picture we have been sketching and to draw attention to them as well, given the importance they had in creating around the regime that mass consensus which resulted in the landslide victory in the elections of March 25, 1934. A result—admittedly—achieved in an illiberal climate and which therefore cannot be taken at face value, but which broadly reflected the prevailing sentiment among Italians at that time.

3. The Years of Consensus: The Regime.

From a constitutional standpoint, Italy was governed from 1922 to 1943 by a single Mussolini cabinet, which, however, underwent so many reshuffles (or, as they were preferred to be called at the time, so many "ministerial rotations") over the course of two decades that, in fact, one can speak of various cabinets presided over uninterruptedly by Mussolini.

If one accepts this criterion for internal distinction, it can be said that, of all these ministries, the one formed by the cabinet reshuffle of September 12, 1929, was most likely not only the one with the largest number of actual heads of the various departments but also the most significant and authoritative in terms of the political prestige and technical expertise of its members.

After the “plebiscite,” everyone expected a series of changes to the government lineup. No one, however, had anticipated a reshuffle so extensive that it would practically transform the face of the government.

In fact, only three of the old ministers were retained: Rocco at Justice, Mosconi at Finance, and Ciano at Communications. At the Ministry of National Economy—which was stripped of a number of responsibilities transferred to the Ministry of Corporations and transformed into the Ministry of Agriculture—Martelli was replaced by Acerbo; at the Ministry of Public Instruction, renamed the Ministry of National Education, Belluzzo was replaced by B. Giuliano. The most significant changes—or at least those that made the greatest impression—occurred, however, in the eight ministries that Mussolini had gradually accumulated for himself.

Of these, the Duce retained only one—the Ministry of the Interior—where he was joined by L. Arpinati as undersecretary, though Arpinati effectively served as the ministry’s head.

The respective undersecretaries were promoted to head six of the other ministries: Grandi to Foreign Affairs, Gazzera to War, Sirianni to the Navy, Balbo to the Air Force, De Bono to the Colonies, and Bottai to the Corporations. The eighth ministry headed by Mussolini, that of Public Works, was assigned to M. Bianchi, who had until then served as undersecretary of the Interior.

F. Giunta was confirmed as undersecretary to the Presidency. M. Bianchi died shortly thereafter, on February 3, 1930; ten days later, A. Di Crollalanza was appointed to replace him at the Ministry of the Budget.

The scope of the cabinet reshuffle—and above all the fact that Mussolini had relinquished personal control over most of the ministries (including the military ones, considered among the most important)—explains how, in the particular climate that had emerged immediately after the plebiscite, both in Italy and even abroad, there were those who deluded themselves into believing that Mussolini’s policies were on the verge of a turning point and that the cabinet reshuffle foreshadowed a liberalization of the regime.

In a speech delivered on September 14, 2, Mussolini was quick to refute these speculations:

“Some,” he said, “will not fall into the truly unforgivable error of believing that the government’s reorganization signifies a change in its policies—a government with a greater emphasis on fascism: its policies can therefore only be emphatically fascist.” Only nostalgic fools—half-hearted converts or those who have been lured along—can ramble or childishly fantasize about “times” tinged with or drifting toward demo-liberalism. Never before have I so keenly gauged the wretched vanity and blatant falsehood of demo-liberalism. Never before have I felt so keenly the vital relevance of our doctrine of the centralized and authoritarian state. What the idolaters of the formless multitude call—with a gesture of vain condemnation—“dictatorship,” we recognize: dictatorship lies in facts, that is, in the necessity

of a single command, in the political, moral, and intellectual strength of the man who exercises it, and in the goals he sets for himself.

Despite this clear Mussolini-style stance, not all illusions vanished. For quite some time afterward, both in Italy and abroad, people continued to speculate about a possible reversal by Mussolini and to interpret government actions and initiatives in this light—actions that, in reality, had no other purpose than to curb individual abuses and malfunctions within the political or bureaucratic apparatus.

The ease and frequency with which these illusions resurfaced in the following years—in 1932, on the occasion of the "tenth-anniversary" amnesty, in 1934, following the new "electoral consultation" of March 25 and the "Caldara affair," and above all during the conquest of Ethiopia—clearly demonstrate, on the one hand, how strongly the need for a liberalization of the regime was still felt and, on the other hand, how few people, even at that time, many had understood the true nature of the Fascist regime, its historical significance, and the intimate, inseparable connection that—despite all the prestige and personal power of the Duce—existed between it and Mussolini's political initiative, or, if one prefers, between the objective and essentially static reality of the regime and the margin of autonomy afforded to the Duce's political initiative.

It cannot be ruled out that Mussolini, up until around 1936, occasionally entertained the idea of a certain liberalization of the regime, and there is no shortage of evidence to suggest this was likely. As we have already noted, however, this liberalization could only have been very limited, and in any case, to be feasible, it required two preconditions, which were difficult to achieve individually and practically impossible to achieve together, since one effectively ruled out the other: that the democratic anti-fascist opposition—or at least a significant part of it—would deem it acceptable and that, at the same time, the various components of the regime would not only accept it as well, but accept it on terms that made it acceptable to the anti-fascists.

This explains why Mussolini's aspirations never materialized into an initiative that might suggest an actual willingness to try to put them into practice; and if anything was done, it amounted to an attempt to politically "co-opt" a few more moderate or isolated anti-fascist elements, primarily with the aim of exploiting their allegiance to the regime for propaganda purposes and of undermining the anti-fascist opposition.

In addition to this, another no less important fact must be kept in mind. The events in Spain in 1930 (the fall of Primo de Rivera) and 1931 (the proclamation of the Republic) made a profound impression on Mussolini.

Among the Fascists, the most widespread reaction was to attribute responsibility not so much to De Rivera (generally described as a false dictator, "an instrument and expedient of the monarch's policy") as to Alfonso XIII, who was accused of having first endorsed the dictatorship in accordance with his own absolutist tendencies and, second, of having heeded the discontent of the old politicians and consequently using it as a pretext to indirectly warn Victor Emmanuel III and the Italian monarchy not to be tempted to imitate the Spanish sovereign: as the *Corriere Padano* had written as early as February 1930, the fall of a genuine dictator under a monarchical regime would imply the fall of the monarchy. In a country brimming with vital energy, politically alert and educated, dictatorship and

monarchy could not separate their fates; simul stabun or simul cadent.

The fall of the Spanish monarchy prompted Mussolini to make certain reflections—or, as he called them, “aphorisms”—which have remained unpublished to this day and allow us to form a fairly precise idea of the psychological and political reactions this event aroused in him, as well as the influence they had on his political stance regarding at least three fundamental issues. With regard to the monarchy, the Spanish crisis led Mussolini to attach ever less importance to the institutional issue: if the king truly understood the meaning and function of the monarchy, “today it is no longer a question of republic or monarchy, but of communism or fascism.”

In short, if the monarchy did not renege on its “pact” with fascism, the question of its survival was, at least for the time being, a pseudo-problem, entirely secondary to that of the struggle against communism and its standard-bearer, democracy (which Mussolini symptomatically interpreted as a product of the cities that had overwhelmed the countryside in Spain).

More important, however, following the lessons of Spain, was the issue of relations with the Church. As a longtime anticlerical socialist, Mussolini had until then believed that the Church was a powerful instrumentum regni, necessarily aligned with regimes of “order.”

One of the aphorisms inspired by the events in Spain in 1931 clearly suggests that these events led him to reconsider this conviction and, consequently, to place less trust both in the political importance of the Church and in its ability to effectively mold men of order who were impervious to democratic influences.

The aphorism in question reads as follows:

Even in Italy, some are surprised that the Spanish clergy and the Catholics of Spain abandoned the monarchy. This happened exactly one week after the Easter ceremonies during which the King had washed the feet of beggars and taken part in a procession. His Catholic Majesty of Spain had no defenders among the Catholics. That is the fact. But what were the reasons? Reasons of a historical nature: the Church does not make political institutions a matter of real concern, except in an extremely theoretical sense; rather, it judges institutions by the attitude they adopt toward the Church. There is no doubt that the Spanish monarchy favored the Church.

Nevertheless, that support was lacking. We must realize that bishops are not political leaders or army generals, but shepherds: the people they lead form a flock, a flock of sheep. Now, a single wolf can scatter a million sheep.

The third issue is the one that concerns us most directly at this moment. The Spanish experience clearly demonstrated that first De Rivera and then the king had fallen because they had not consistently pursued a dictatorial policy and because they had liberalized the vestiges of the dictatorial regime they

had established.

In light of this experience, the problem could not, therefore, be to liberalize the regime but, on the contrary, to strengthen it:

A regime is not defended at the eleventh hour: it is defended from the very beginning and subsequently at every hour and every minute—and even at the very last hour—but in this case with the most unyielding resolve: what are a thousand deaths (though a volley of blanks might suffice) if one is convinced that the triumph of a certain principle means the ruin of a people and the likelihood of an infinitely greater number of victims tomorrow?

That said, it must be noted immediately that in September 1929—even though, of course, the Spanish experience had not yet been able to influence him in reshaping his government—Mussolini was thinking of everything except laying the groundwork for a liberalization of the regime. Whatever some might have hoped, his intentions at that moment were entirely different. The domestic political situation was firmly in his hands and had by then been set on a course that guaranteed a long period of stability and security for the regime; the situation within the PNF was also firmly in Turati's hands and, apart from isolated chronic cases of local "factionalism," gave no cause for concern; even Farinacci now seemed willing to put an end to—or at least somewhat moderate—his polemics; the economic situation (in September, no one foresaw the storm that was about to hit the U.S. economy and, by extension, the global economy) was heading toward steady improvement and progress; finally, the international situation also appeared to present no substantial difficulties for Italy; therefore, given this general situation, the future for Mussolini had never been so favorable and secure, and he could realistically believe that the regime could now move from the phase of defining its characteristics and primary institutions to that of carrying out what he now considered his "historic"—that is, longer-term—tasks: the transformation of the fundamental characteristics and the dynamics of the socio-economic-demographic development of Italian society, and its complete "Fascistization"—both in the present and, above all, in the future—through the systematic education of the younger generations "in the spirit of the fasces."

From this perspective, the significance that the government reshuffle (which, let us not forget, would be mirrored in the weeks immediately following by the reorganization of the PNF—carried out, as we have seen, through the new party statute and the amendment to the law on the Grand Council:

1) had for Mussolini can, broadly speaking, be summarized as follows:

a) to emphasize the fascist character of the government, including through its composition and, in particular, the presence of as many as three quadrunviri;

b) to increasingly imbue the figure of the Duce with the character of a leader, freeing him from almost all the specific responsibilities he had gradually assumed (the fact that Mussolini retained the Ministry of the Interior can be seen as a manifestation of his desire to directly control what is, in all authoritarian regimes, the key ministry, but also as the consequence of a more political concern: to ensure that, in the

event of conflicts between the party and the state—as had occurred in the days of Farinacci and Federzoni—the state would be represented by the foremost figure among the Fascists, thereby eliminating any question of who should have the final say), so that, even formally, Mussolini would no longer resemble in any way the old prime minister of the liberal era, who was merely primus inter pares;

c) to decentralize authority and assign more direct responsibility—based on their ministerial functions and areas of expertise—to those who, until then, had been Mussolini's principal subordinate collaborators in the ministries he nominally headed;

d) to formally ensure the continuity of leadership in those ministries (Justice and Finance, since Ciano's continued tenure at Communications likely had another purpose—namely, to keep the Duce's designated successor within the government) that had not yet fully implemented the political program assigned to them during the previous phase of the regime;

e) to emphasize—both by changing the names of certain ministries and appointing new heads to them, and by creating new ad hoc undersecretaries, such as those for Comprehensive Land Reclamation and for Physical Education and Youth Affairs—the importance and the new tasks henceforth assigned to agricultural policy and to policies toward the younger generations;

f) to reaffirm the principle of technical self-governance of the armed forces and the institutional separation of the MVSN from them;

g) to demonstrate that Fascism was indeed making way for young people even in the most important positions of the State (Balbo was thirty-three years old, Bottai thirty-four).

Beyond day-to-day administration, the essential objectives that Mussolini intended to achieve domestically during this new "cycle of government" can be grouped into four categories.

On the one hand, there were certain typically fascist "reforms" that had not been completed during the previous cycle and that needed to be implemented as soon as possible in order to finalize the regime's foundational structures. Among these "reforms," the most important was certainly the revision—that is, the adaptation to the new political climate—of the legal codes, particularly the criminal and civil codes.

For the time being, however, Rocco would manage to carry out only the reform of the former: the new Penal Code and, along with it, the Code of Criminal Procedure came into effect on July 1, 1931; the preparatory work for the new Civil Code and the Code of Civil Procedure (even though the revision of the old codes of 1865 was almost unanimously deemed necessary) would, on the other hand, drag on for a very long time, amid controversies and conflicts of various kinds, so that the two codes would not come into effect until April 21, 1942.

On the other hand, there was the major problem of the national budget. Ever since De Stefani had succeeded in eliminating the deficit in 1924–25, the budget had consistently remained in surplus, and this had been one of the regime's greatest points of pride.

With the "Quota Novanta" crisis, the situation had gradually become more difficult; in full agreement with Mussolini, Volpi, and above all Mosconi (who had succeeded Volpi as Minister of Finance in July 1928, at the same time that Martelli had taken Belluzzo's place as Minister of National Economy), they had initially managed to cope with it through a strict austerity policy; now, however, with the 1929–30

fiscal year, the risk of a resurgence of the deficit had become very serious, causing concern among everyone—both for reasons of prestige and because the dire state of the budget threatened to force a scaling back of planned public works and land reclamation projects, and because—even setting aside the issue of prestige—Mussolini, Mosconi, and above all the highly influential State Accountant General V. De Bellis—were, in accordance with the most widely accepted economic theories of the time, staunch advocates of the view that a balanced budget was the best indicator of a healthy economic situation.

On the other hand, while expenditures were rising, revenues were tending to decline, and the inter-union committee itself, with Turati's support, was calling for further tax cuts—which the Council of Ministers had granted in the summer of '29 (to the tune of half a billion) only because Mussolini had prevailed over Mosconi.

Although the country's overall economic situation was improving, Mosconi believed that the 1930–31 budget was likely to show a "significant" deficit.

In this situation, the government faced the dual challenge of, on the one hand, balancing the budget and, on the other, not sacrificing spending on public works and land reclamation in the name of fiscal balance—spending that constituted one of the cornerstones of the regime's policy for the new "cycle of government" and one of the prerequisites for another of the fundamental objectives Mussolini sought to achieve during this period: the "ruralization" of Italian society.

As can be seen, this was a problem that would have been difficult to resolve under relatively normal circumstances, and one that was absolutely insoluble in the situation that arose shortly thereafter with the Great Depression, which rapidly disrupted the entire economic landscape, multiplying expenditures and reducing actual revenues.

According to official reports, the 1929–30 fiscal year was the last to show a surplus, albeit a small one (170 million).

Without delving into the details of the Fascist financial policy of those years, if one wishes to assess its political significance, it is necessary to understand how—having been forced, for the time being, to abandon the principle of defending a balanced budget at all costs—the government addressed this situation and at what cost.

And as the crisis progressed, the need to address it came to revolve—as already seen in the previous chapter—primarily around three types of measures aimed, respectively, at containing unemployment through an increasingly extensive public works program; at helping and rescuing, directly or indirectly, companies in difficulty or in financial distress, and to bring about gradual economic deflation, aimed initially (November 1930) at reducing prices, costs, and wages to a ratio of 1 to 4 compared to prewar levels, and subsequently (summer 1933) to a ratio of 1 to 3, again compared to prewar levels.

None of the three objectives was fully achieved on its own; the sacrifices imposed on the country—especially on the lower rungs of the social ladder—were considerable, and overcoming the crisis, as we have seen, took much longer than anticipated. Nevertheless, the partial results obtained cannot be underestimated, especially when comparing the Italian situation with that of other European countries, and in particular with that of France.

Given the state of the Italian economy, the severity of the trade and balance of payments deficits, and

the resources available to the government, the national budget deficit was kept within limits that were, for the time being, still manageable.

On the one hand, by resorting to a series of tax hikes (in 1934, Mussolini would have to acknowledge "that the tax burden has reached its absolute limit and that the Italian taxpayer must be left completely undisturbed for a while and, if possible, relieved of some of the burden, so that we do not find him crushed and defeated under the heavy yoke"), on the other hand, a series of cost-cutting measures (on salaries and general and administrative expenses, as well as reducing a portion of the appropriations requested by the military departments and initially granted to them), and on yet another front, a series of measures aimed at lowering the cost of capital (a gradual reduction of the discount rate to 3%), to absorb it (issuance of new nine-year Treasury bonds at 4%), and above all to lighten the burdens weighing on the budget (in February 1934, by converting the consolidated debt at 5% and the "Littorio" debt—also at 5%—into a new redeemable loan at 3.50%), Mosconi and his successor (from July 1932) G. Jung succeeded in addressing the most urgent needs—especially those aimed at curbing unemployment—without irreparably compromising the possibility of a future fiscal recovery and without increasing the money supply (which, in fact, fell from 16,774 million to 13,028 million between 1929 and 1935).

Significant in this regard is the classification of actual expenditures by service sector developed by Repaci; it clearly illustrates the extent of the effort made during these years to expand the various types of activities that could provide employment for the unemployed workforce.

At this point in our discussion, it is not appropriate to address the issue—to which we will return—of the limitations of these fiscal policy choices, their political and economic significance, their connection to Mussolini's decision not to decouple the lira from its gold standard, even after the devaluation of the pound in 1931 and the dollar in 1933, and the dissent they provoked within the Fascist leadership.

Similarly, we do not believe it is appropriate to delve now into an analysis of the other aspects of the economic policy implemented by the government during the years of the Great Depression and their impact on the evolution of the regime.

For the moment, it suffices to mention a single issue, closely linked to the fiscal policy we have discussed: that of its cost.

And, in this regard as well, we believe the discussion can be limited to just two of the most significant aspects: the immediate economic cost of this policy to the state and, conversely, the more strictly political cost—namely, the consequences it had with respect to Mussolini's original plans and the government he had launched in September 1929.

On the first aspect, the discussion can be very brief and can be reduced to the observation that, in order to implement his policy of relatively containing the state budget deficit, Mussolini was forced to drain the gold reserves of the Bank of Italy (from 10,341 million as of December 31, 1929, to 5,883 as of December 31, 1934), a move that would have very serious consequences for the regime's entire policy.

It is no coincidence that Mussolini himself, in mid-1934, in a long letter to Jung—which served as a sort of economic review of the past year—described the issue of the reserves as the most serious and stated that it was not possible to fall below six billion.

We need to dwell a bit longer on the second aspect. From the very first years after coming to power,

Fascism had significantly expanded its public works policy, to the point that one of the main tenets of its propaganda became the claim that, in the first ten years of its rule, it had spent more in this crucial area than the liberal-democratic governments had spent in sixty years.

And undoubtedly much was accomplished, even if often in a haphazard manner and according to questionable criteria. During the years of the Great Depression—as has been noted—this policy was not interrupted but, on the contrary, was expanded (at the most difficult moment, in 1931, an extraordinary allocation of one billion three hundred fifty million was made); the data compiled by Repaci speak for themselves in this regard.

Some, both among leading figures in the business world and among politicians (for example, A. Turati), would have preferred that, instead of allocating new funds for public works, the government provide greater assistance to industry and agriculture, thereby enabling them to better weather the crisis, employ more workers, and stimulate greater circulation of money.

Mussolini, however, always proved hostile to these suggestions. For him, in fact, the public works policy—in addition to aligning well with his activist-populist mindset—had at least two positive aspects: on the one hand, to quote a telling headline from an article in *Gerarchia*, it served to present Italy—despite the crisis—as a "booming construction site," that is, to offer Italians and foreigners immediate, tangibly visible proof of the regime's achievements; on the other hand, it served to curb unemployment to some extent and to take direct credit for this—both for himself and for his "provident" government.

The crisis and the budgetary difficulties associated with it did not, therefore, interrupt but rather strengthened the public works policy. On closer inspection, however, what at first glance might seem like a success—and was essentially presented as such by the regime's propaganda—was in reality a serious setback for Mussolini.

For the regime, comprehensive land reclamation was an essential part of the public works policy. In 1927, the Duce had said:

This five-year period brings to a close the policy in favor of the cities, which have received from the Regime all the funding and support necessary for their beautification and their needs. We must therefore intensify, starting today, the policy in favor of the village.

Between "over-emphasis on cities" and "over-emphasis on villages," I am in favor of the latter. But this rural policy requires greater resources. We must keep in mind, first and foremost, the need for forestry and water management projects; second, the need to implement a comprehensive land reclamation policy.

Land reclamation projects must also be supplemented with appropriate irrigation systems, since reclaimed areas cannot be allowed to remain deserts. To achieve all this, sufficient support must be given to sound and rational rural initiatives.

With this in mind, at the end of the following year, the so-called “Mussolini Law” for comprehensive land reclamation (No. 3134 of December 24, 1928, supplemented and revised by Royal Decree No. 215 of February 13, 1933) was enacted, and its implementation began on July 1, 1929.

Despite the complexity of its mechanisms and the procedures it entailed, the law had been conceived by Arrigo Serpieri, one of the finest technical experts of the Fascist era, using modern and, in some respects, even avant-garde criteria that went well beyond the traditional objectives of hydraulic reclamation and the fight against malaria and aimed to carry out a comprehensive program of agricultural transformation capable of developing the country’s most underdeveloped agricultural areas.

The cost of this complex of projects was to be borne primarily by the state, and amounted in practice to a full seven billion over fourteen years.

In September 1929, when Mussolini reshuffled the government, comprehensive land reclamation (for the implementation of which, as mentioned, an ad hoc undersecretariat headed by Serpieri was created) had become one of the most important and defining features of the new “cycle of government.”

The Duce, in outlining this “gigantic” plan, had spoken of it as “an effort that can fill a people with pride and create an enduring title of glory for the Fascist regime.”

Such a vast and demanding plan, in order to be truly carried out and yield lasting results, required above all two things: that the state’s financial commitment be fulfilled promptly and consistently, without missing a beat and without any delays, and that the state be able to persuade—and, if necessary, compel—the private landowners in the reclamation areas to comply with the obligations imposed on them by law to complete the public effort.

During the first three years, the law was enforced fairly systematically and yielded good results. However, difficulties began in 1932.

Despite all of Serpieri’s attempts to convince Mussolini and the finance officials that scaling back the programs would make it impossible to achieve comprehensive results—even if reduced compared to those originally projected—and would therefore have negative consequences both politically and economically, under the pressure of the crisis and a whole series of contingent and local demands, the disbursement of funds for comprehensive land reclamation was delayed and reduced in favor of other initiatives and investments in public works that could be implemented immediately and that could employ the unemployed workforce in a more “political” manner.

Hence the need for a series of adjustments and scale-backs to the overall framework of the comprehensive land reclamation program itself.

If we add to this the fact that, in this situation, the majority of private landowners shirked the obligations the law imposed on them—generally citing the economic difficulties of the moment and the State’s partial failure to fulfill its obligations (the non-completion or delay of certain works)—it becomes clear why we have referred to this as a serious setback for Mussolini.

Undoubtedly, the reclamation project—albeit scaled back—was carried out and achieved overall results that should not be underestimated (especially in areas such as the Agro Pontino, the Tavoliere di Puglia, and the Basso Volturno, where, for reasons of prestige or due to specific local circumstances, the state was able to overcome agricultural resistance and proceed with expropriations and land subdivision) and, in some cases, results of considerable significance.

This was particularly true of the Agro Pontino, whose reclamation and colonization—with the founding of Littoria (December 1932), Sabaudia (August 1933), and, subsequently, Pontinia and Aprilia—generated enormous attention in Italy and abroad and constituted one of Fascism's greatest political successes.

It is equally true, however, that, on the whole, the results of the comprehensive land reclamation fell short not only of what was envisaged in Serpieri's original plan (who, not coincidentally, in January 1935, after attempting in vain to revive it, resigned from his post as undersecretary for comprehensive land reclamation), but also of the expectations raised throughout the country by the propaganda campaign that had been launched, and ultimately failed to match the scale of the economic effort expended.

In addition to this—and this brings us to the third category of objectives that, as mentioned, Mussolini intended to achieve in September 1929 during his new term in office—there is no doubt that, as far as the Duce was most directly concerned, the scaling back of the original program of integral land reclamation and the actual results achieved contributed to the miserable failure of his plans to transform the fundamental characteristics and the dynamics of development of Italian society—or, if one prefers to use an expression quite common in fascist political journalism and in the regime's propaganda of those years, to "ruralize" Italy.

Given what we have just said about "integral reclamation" and in the previous chapter on the severity of the agricultural crisis during the Great Depression, dwelling at length on Mussolini's plans for "ruralization" might at first glance seem almost pointless.

In reality, the issue of ruralization held such an important place in Mussolini's political vision during those years that it is impossible to dismiss it with a few brief remarks and the observation that attempts to implement it failed; a failure so complete that Italian society in the second decade of Fascism developed—despite the regime's initial intentions and efforts—along a path practically opposite to the one that, at the end of the 1920s, Mussolini had decided it should follow; and of the rural policy, the only components that survived the storm of the "Great Crisis" were the "disciplinary" aspect regarding migration and, above all, the demographic aspect—which was, in itself, perhaps the most absurd and, in any case, increasingly understood not as an aspect of land development and agricultural enhancement, but as the cornerstone of a policy of expansion, colonization, and military power.

The origins of the ruralization policy are clear and, in their own way, are not without a certain logic, even if only apparent.

For Mussolini, the need for a ruralization policy stemmed from a series of considerations, both ideological-cultural and practical.

On the one hand, it was rooted in the conviction—as we saw in the first chapter—that the Duce had formed that the "crisis of Western civilization" could be averted by containing and even reversing the

trend toward “supercapitalism,” industrial urbanization, and demographic decline.

On the other hand, it was fueled by a twofold observation of fact: that inflation was driven by overly rapid industrial—and thus urban—development, and that agriculture, despite the success of the “Battle of the Wheat,” was unable to recover and was being depleted of both labor and capital.

On yet another front, Mussolini realized that—in the immediate political sphere—the stability and cohesion of the regime had a weak point in the industrial sector (among both workers and entrepreneurs), in the centrifugal tendencies it was developing with respect to the type of socio-economic equilibrium on which fascism was founded.

Hence, according to Mussolini, the need for a transformation of the basic characteristics and developmental dynamics of Italian society—to be achieved (in addition, of course, to fostering in Italians, and especially in the younger generations, a “true”

“fascist consciousness” and a “healthy”

“rural awareness”) through:

a) the massive strengthening and development of agriculture in every respect—cultivated land, workforce, mechanization, investment, and production—even if the latter were to lose value (“I am in favor of an abundance of products even if they cost—as is inevitable—less. Abundance is always a blessing if it is true—and so far it has always been true—that famine is synonymous with hunger and misery”);

b) the restructuring of industry, based, on the one hand, on the containment of large-scale industry and, on the other hand, on the healthy development of small and medium-sized enterprises (especially those linked to agriculture: “a prosperous agricultural sector serves as an incentive for industrial development within the nation, since many branches of industry [mechanical, chemical, textile, etc.] are linked to it”);

c) the creation of a mixed economy, in which a vast agricultural sector would both stimulate and regulate industrial development, and industry would focus more on the domestic market than on foreign markets.

Significantly, as late as November 1933—when the ruralization policy had by then largely failed—Mussolini, speaking to the National Council of Corporations, stated:

In my view, Italy must remain a nation with a mixed economy, featuring a strong agricultural sector—which is the foundation of everything, so much so that the slight revival of industry observed in recent times is attributable, as is the unanimous opinion of those in the know, to the decent agricultural harvests of recent years—a healthy small and medium-sized industrial sector, a banking system that does not engage in speculation, a commercial sector that fulfills its irreplaceable role, which is to deliver goods to consumers quickly and efficiently.

Only in this way could Italy have achieved a truly healthy and balanced economy, sheltered from recurring crises and, above all, capable of escaping the irreparable failures of “supercapitalism”—first and foremost those that, as we have seen, Mussolini considered the most evident and incontrovertible manifestations of the “crisis of Western civilization”: urbanization and demographic decline.

Only in this way could Fascist Italy, on the one hand, demonstrate its moral superiority over the traditional great European powers (France and England), which—having completed their unification processes centuries ago—were by then “exhausted and finished,” and, on the other hand, be able to stand up to the “compact masses of Germans and Slavs” pressing against its borders and, thus, justify its aspirations to its own historical role and to its own empire—both moral and political-territorial.

In short, by “ruralizing,” Mussolini sought to resolve at once all the problems of “old” Italy and all the aspirations of “new” Italy; “ruralization”—as absurd, anachronistic, and ahistorical as this may seem to us—a confused, typically petty-bourgeois mixture of vastly different motives and ideas—meant for him a radical transformation of the very innermost characteristics of Italian society, both economic and moral, and, at the same time, laying the groundwork (““numbers mean power”) for a new role and a new power for Italy in the world.

An undertaking of such magnitude (“colossal,” as Mussolini described it to Giuriati) obviously required not only time but also enormous financial resources.

The Duce was well aware of this; yet no price seemed too high to him in comparison to the grandeur and “historic” significance that its realization would have.

On March 24, 1927, in a letter to G. Giuriati, then Minister of Public Works, who had forwarded to him the final report on the preparatory work carried out by the Standing Committee on Internal Migration, he stated in no uncertain terms: “Italy must be ruralized, even if it takes billions and half a century.”

And it is precisely to this date that we can trace the beginning of the phase of concrete preparation for the ruralization policy, which—according to Mussolini’s plans—was destined to move into the phase of actual implementation with the new “cycle of government” that began in September 1929.

It is no coincidence that it was precisely after this date that Mussolini began to speak and write more and more frequently about the need to ruralize Italy, to place agriculture “at the forefront of the national economy,” to bring about a “return to the land,” to combat urbanization, to expand land reclamation and internal colonization, and, above all, to implement a decisive demographic policy that would go far beyond the measures taken up to that point (the introduction of a tax on bachelors, the expansion of maternity and child welfare, etc.): a whole series of positions that culminated in the essay-preface (“The Number as a Force”) to the Italian translation of R. Korherr’s study, *Declining Birth Rates: The Death of Nations*, which was previewed in the pages of *Gerarchia* (September 1928) and widely reprinted and discussed throughout the regime’s press.

And rightly so, given that there is no doubt this text can and should be considered the ideological manifesto of Mussolini’s ruralism.

In this regard, its closing passage is highly significant, clearly revealing the main aspects and political implications of the Duce’s ruralist conception:

The question is whether or not the soul of Fascist Italy is irreparably tainted by hedonism, bourgeoisie, and philistinism. The birth rate is not merely an indicator of the nation's growing power; it is not merely, as Spengler says, "the only weapon of the Italian people," but it is also what will distinguish the Fascist people from other European peoples, in that it will indicate their vitality and their will to pass this vitality down through the centuries. If we do not swim against the current, everything the Fascist Revolution has done and will do will be utterly useless because, at a certain point, camps, schools, barracks, ships, and workshops will no longer have men. A French writer who has addressed these issues has said: to speak of national problems, the nation must first exist. Now, a nation exists not only as history or as territory, but as human masses that reproduce from generation to generation. Otherwise, it is either servitude or extinction. Italian Fascists: Hegel, the philosopher of the state, said: "He who is not a father is not a man!"

In an Italy that is fully reclaimed, cultivated, irrigated, and disciplined—that is, a fascist Italy—there is still room and bread for ten million men. Sixty million Italians will make their mass and their strength felt in world history.

To achieve this undertaking, there were four key sectors in which the regime intended to intervene and exert its greatest effort.

The results achieved in these sectors were, in fact, intended to gradually exert a mutual influence on one another and to act as corrective and balancing forces on all other sectors as well, ultimately bringing about a change in the dynamics of development of Italian society as a whole.

The first sector was the most directly and immediately agricultural: agriculture was to benefit from the maximum possible support and intervention by the state, so as to expand production to the fullest extent, modernize, and become more economically profitable.

The second sector was that of comprehensive land reclamation and, complementing it, rural construction and public works: the aim of this complex of projects was to expand arable land, enable new crops, improve the living conditions of the farming classes, and thereby make new settlements possible, both in reclaimed areas and, more generally, in agricultural areas.

The third sector concerned migration: while awaiting the revival of agriculture and the ability to settle the reclaimed areas, it was necessary to prevent the rural population from continuing to be drawn to large cities and industries; indeed, it was necessary to encourage a process of de-urbanization and a return to the land.

Finally, the fourth sector was demographics: it was necessary to halt the decline in the birth rate (which became more pronounced as people moved from agricultural areas to large urban centers) and, here too, to reverse the trend in order to increase the population, especially among farmers and residents of small

and medium-sized towns.

In reality, partly due to the onset of the Great Depression, partly due to the disproportion (even if this had not occurred) between the objectives to be achieved and the resources actually available, and, above all, due to the anachronism and inherent absurdity (both from an economic standpoint and, even more so, from a human one) of the ultimate goal it sought to achieve, the regime failed to achieve success in any of these four sectors, and Mussolini was certainly unable to see even the foundations of Italy's much-desired ruralization come to fruition.

Agriculture undoubtedly underwent a significant process of capitalist restructuring (primarily through the dismantling of non-entrepreneurial landownership in favor of small-scale farming holdings and a certain concentration of the latter into large capitalist enterprises), just as, equally undoubtedly, it made considerable technical progress, and in the sector of cereal cultivation (and in particular wheat cultivation), production recorded a significant increase, so much so that for the first time Italy managed to achieve self-sufficiency in cereals; in other sectors (except for certain high-quality or export crops guaranteed by a series of trade agreements), the situation, on the whole, was characterized by widespread stagnation, while livestock production saw a marked decline.

The regime's efforts yielded positive results in terms of expanding cultivated land, utilizing the labor force, and increasing production (the agricultural trade deficit, which in 1926 exceeded 60% of the total, would be reduced to about 15% by 1938).

Despite this, the actual state of agriculture as a whole did not achieve the desired improvements, and, compared to other sectors, the agricultural sector ended up being the most disadvantaged, as clearly demonstrated by the declining income from the land and the collapse in the rate of growth of agricultural value added.

Finally, regarding the living and working conditions of the various agricultural groups, it is easy to see how, in a general situation of this kind, they did not undergo substantial changes and, indeed, in purely economic terms, they often deteriorated.

As for comprehensive land reclamation, in light of what we have already said, it suffices to add that, according to Bandini's estimates, the land that had been satisfactorily transformed—"achieving remarkable production results, coupled with denser farm settlements"—amounted to approximately 220,000–250,000 hectares by 1938, while a complete irrigation system was established on another 100,000 hectares, "which increased production without, however, creating new settlements."

In light of these positive results, it should also be borne in mind that the regime's land reclamation efforts had, during the same period, been fully implemented (in the sense that the related public and private works had been completed) across approximately 2,600,000 hectares, so that—as Bandini further noted—it can be concluded that "significant benefits" were actually derived from only about 10% of the reclaimed area.

"In the remaining areas, either no benefits were realized at all, or only modest productive gains were achieved, without any visible transformations in agricultural systems or rural life."

Even in the area of regulating internal migration and combating urbanization, the results achieved were essentially modest.

A series of ad hoc measures, implemented by both the PS and the Commissariat for Internal Migration (which, starting in 1930, reported directly to the Duce), undoubtedly succeeded in curbing the phenomenon, but not in halting it, much less in reversing the trend.

The flow of migrants from the South and the islands, especially toward the northern regions, was significantly curtailed. The urban population, however, continued to grow (45% in 1921, 51% in 1931, and nearly 55% in 1936), and above all, the population of major cities increased, where natural growth was relatively low and so-called "social" growth—that is, growth resulting from migration (originating not so much from smaller municipalities as from medium-sized ones)—was more pronounced.

This phenomenon occurred in all regional capitals and in municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, where the influx came mainly from neighboring localities; from 1931 to 1936, the population increase in these municipalities was 9.92% (national average: 4.23%), with three-tenths attributable to natural increase and seven-tenths to social increase. This was particularly strong in Lazio (61.1 per thousand), partly due to the settlement of the Agro Pontino, but especially due to migration to Rome.

Despite all government measures, Rome—along with Milan, Genoa, and Turin—continued throughout the 1930s to attract a significant migratory flow. Rome, which from 1921 to 1930 had recorded a net migration balance of 215,878 people, recorded a balance of as many as 358,049 people from 1931 to 1940.

Throughout 1933, the regulation of internal migration achieved its best results elsewhere, in the organization and implementation of the relocation of unemployed workers to areas where they could be usefully employed, especially in agriculture and public works (over 1,711,000 from 1929 to 1933), in the colonization of reclaimed areas (over 5,500 families), Libya (about 500 families), and in the resettlement of 1,876 families in an equal number of road maintenance workers' homes managed by the Autonomous State Roads Authority.

Finally, as for the "demographic battle," its results were also rather modest, certainly far below Mussolini's hopes and the effort the regime put into it, both in terms of propaganda and in legislative and financial terms (taxation of single men, privileges for married couples with children and for married couples in general compared to single men, loans to couples about to marry, birth bonuses, subsidies and benefits for large families, assistance for mothers and children, etc.).

The most significant results were achieved in reducing mortality—both general and infant—and, by 1936, in increasing the marriage rate.

Overall, however, both the birth rate and natural increase (that is, the excess of births over deaths) continued to decline.

It should also be noted that no appreciable results were achieved in terms of a demographic revival of the urban population: despite all the efforts made by the regime, the most fertile areas remained those in the south and on the islands (especially Puglia and Lucania), while urban centers—especially the larger ones—continued to record birth rates significantly below the average (in 1934, for example, the birth rate in municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants was 17% lower than the national average).

The only exception among the five most populous cities (over half a million inhabitants) was Rome,

partly due to the massive presence of large segments of the population consisting of recent immigrants (and thus still tied to a traditional conception of the family) and partly due to the large number of white-collar workers and government officials, who were necessarily more responsive to the regime's demographic appeals: in 1938–39, while the national average natural increase was 9.94 per thousand, Rome recorded an increase of 12.32 per thousand, Naples 8.23, Milan 5.01, and Turin 1.83.

This—in broad terms—is the assessment of the ruralization policy. An assessment that the regime's propaganda managed to portray as partially successful (above all by emphasizing the land reclamation projects to the utmost, particularly the Pontine Marshes reclamation) and which, from a social and economic standpoint, certainly presents some partially positive aspects, but which, in terms of the fundamental objectives Mussolini had set out to achieve, must be considered entirely negative: it is in fact indisputable that not only did the ruralization policy fail to transform the basic characteristics and developmental dynamics of Italian society in the direction Mussolini intended, but, on the contrary, "this singular fact occurred: that Italy became an industrial nation precisely during the years of Fascist ruralization."

Faced with a fact so glaring and of such momentous significance with regard to Mussolini's plans, it is clear that one cannot simply record this fact; nor is it possible to dismiss the ruralization policy with a generic reference to its inherent absurdity and to the anachronism of Mussolini's claim to curb the natural development of the Italian economy toward ever-greater modernization and increasing industrialization—and, therefore, toward a reduction (rather than a strengthening) of the agricultural sector's share of the economy.

In order to truly understand the nature of the Fascist regime during these years—and in particular Mussolini's policies—it is necessary to grasp as fully as possible how—beyond the propaganda facade and official statements—the Duce and the various components of the Italian ruling class reacted to an event of such great significance.

And not only that: there is no doubt—both objectively and in relation to the political instruments of intervention at the regime's disposal—that the ruralization policy was absurd and anachronistic and, therefore, inevitably destined to fail in the long run; however, it is difficult to imagine that it would have failed so rapidly and completely under different general economic conditions—that is, in a situation such as the one in which Mussolini had conceived and initiated it.

From this perspective, we believe the decisive factor was that the ruralization policy happened to be launched on the eve of the Great Depression and, as a result, had to contend with its consequences even before facing any other internal resistance within Italian society.

In fact, the crisis not only forced Mussolini to scale back and spread out over time the funds originally allocated to agriculture and the ruralization policy in general, and to intervene instead on a massive scale in support of industry to save it from the crisis itself and to curb the spread of unemployment, but it also offered new and unexpected room for maneuver to those economic and political circles that viewed the ruralization policy with concern and often with hostility, and which under normal conditions would have encountered considerable difficulty in opposing it and proposing effective "corrective measures."

Under the blows of the crisis, the industrial sector—where the policy of promoting agriculture had aroused mistrust and doubts from the very moment it was first outlined, despite the immediate benefits that certain major industrial sectors would derive from it—had an easy time demanding and obtaining

from the state not only the aid and bailouts needed to address the new situation in the manner most immediately advantageous to it, but also a whole series of concessions that, under normal circumstances, would hardly have been granted with the same generosity and ease, and which undoubtedly strengthened the economic position of the most powerful and influential groups.

And if it failed to obtain more, it was above all (as noted in Abrate's aforementioned assessment) due to its lack of ideas, its excessive caution, and its inability to reconcile conflicting sectoral interests and to develop a unified strategy.

This assessment should obviously not lead us to underestimate the significance of the successes achieved by big business during the crisis years on a range of issues of great importance to it, ranging from those pertaining to industrial concentration and cartelization to those that can be grouped under the common denominator of the corporatist implementation (that is, essentially free from government control and coordination) of state emergency measures, to those—more generally—related to the development of the corporatist framework.

To focus solely on the latter, there is in fact no doubt that during this period, big business—and, on its behalf, Confindustria—succeeded—thanks in part to a sort of secret alliance with "a large part of the state administrations operating in the sectors of production, trade, and credit, which feared that the intervention of the corporations would limit their freedom of initiative or make their task more difficult and burdensome, at a time when prompt decision-making and rapid implementation were needed more than ever"—to exploit the gravity of the moment to slow down and, in part, block the development and implementation of the corporative institutions and, above all, to prevent these (which were already barely functional in themselves) from acquiring effective autonomous initiative as the supreme regulatory bodies of the Italian economy.

Thus—as Guarneri rightly wrote—the corporations, structurally cumbersome, stifled by a cumbersome procedure, and surrounded by the mistrust of producers and the state administrations themselves, began their existence as institutions suspended in a vacuum, with no influence either over the organization of the state—of which they were organs—or over that of production—for which they were supposed to become disciplinary and coordinating instruments.

These successes of Confindustria's policy should not—we repeat—be underestimated. However, one fact—and Abrate, ever astute and realistic, has clearly highlighted it—is that precisely during these years, while the most powerful industrial groups were able to strengthen their economic position and successfully counter the dangers they feared might come to them from corporatism, they failed to prevent an ever-increasing direct (i.e., non-corporate) intervention by the state in the economic sphere, and, on closer inspection, they ended up paying for what they gained (often only on a sectoral or even individual basis) in the economic sphere with a significant loss of autonomy and cohesion—that is, of power—in the political sphere.

As for the more strictly political spheres, there is no doubt that the Great Depression played a decisive role in fostering—and in part even sparking—the broad debate that developed during those years around the corporatist issue and, more generally, around how to address Italy's economic situation, as well as around the nature and limits of capitalism; a debate that—as we have seen—culminated in the 1932 Ferrara conference and provided an opportunity to propose solutions and ideas that often stemmed from premises that had little in common with ruralist politics and, in fact, even transcended it.

From this perspective, we believe particular attention should be paid to the efforts of the group led by

Critica fascista, which served Bottai—not only to gather around him some of the most culturally and politically dynamic figures within Fascism, and especially from the second generation of Fascists, but also to circulate certain proposals for the modernization of Italian society and to gauge the reactions of Mussolini and the regime's elite to them. In particular, it served to highlight the need for Fascism to cease identifying itself with anti-socialism and to finally give rise to a new economic and social policy —corporatism—conceived in modern and progressive terms, open to new, even radical, economic experiments, and, in particular, on the one hand, to ever-greater state intervention in all sectors of economic life and, on the other hand, a reevaluation of the labor unions.

In this context, criticism and more or less explicit attacks against the conservative narrow-mindedness of the major economic powers, their parasitism and "anti-fascism," and—on the opposite side—against the absence of a coherent and conscious economic policy vision at the top of the Fascist leadership were by no means rare.

Among the Fascist leaders, the one who most actively championed these ideas and this ferment at the political level—at least until 1932, when the controversies sparked first by the Ferrara conference and then by his removal from the government led him to adopt a more cautious stance—was Bottai, around whom, as has been noted, a large portion of those fascists had gathered who advocated a new political and, above all, social course for the regime—and whom the Great Depression had powerfully helped steer toward a more or less explicitly anti-capitalist stance.

Typical of Bottai's position during this period is his editorial "Revolutionary Resurgence" in the April 1, 1931, issue of *Critica fascista*.

In it, he writes:

We have the feeling that throughout the world the current crisis has now reached a breaking point, where the problem of overcoming it is, more than a technical problem, a moral one, demanding profound solutions. We must come to terms with the idea that there is no going back; that the economic order, whose soundness we have hitherto believed in, is broken forever; that attempting to rebuild it would be a futile endeavor, and that it must be replaced with a new economic order. An attitude of passive waiting or active grumbling while the storm rages, only to return to old habits afterward, would be, of all options, the least intelligent and fruitful… The corporatist system, regarded by most as a mere legal framework, now appears to be the ideal system for a new political civilization. While its practical implementation may be debatable in detail, its essence as a system that renews modern economic policy is indisputable… Political crises lead to the total or partial elimination of the political ruling classes, which have proven unequal to the new tasks demanded by changing times; economic crises lead—perhaps more gradually, given the different nature of the phenomena—to the elimination of the economic ruling classes… This crisis must have… above all, the salutary effects of any crisis, such as the realignment of the productive organization on a sound foundation and the elimination of the incompetent—effects inherent to political and moral selection… This is what is meant (it is worth reminding those with short memories, who love the Charter of Labor—but only in fragments) by the statement: "The organization of the enterprise is responsible to the State for the direction of production," and the other: "Work—a social duty—is a privilege that each generation must renew and justify through work." Property that fails to fulfill its national function would be an anti-historical privilege in a regime such as ours, which—let us remember well—is not a restorer of old conceptions of the state, but the founder of an exemplary modern state.

This statement by Bottai—stripped of rhetorical embellishments and verbal extremism and considered in light of the concrete actions he carried out as Minister of Corporations—allows us to form a fairly precise idea of his fundamental position and to understand the concrete political background of his corporatism; a corporatism that—at least during that specific historical phase of Fascism—was essentially understood by Bottai (in addition, of course, to being the system for achieving, under the aegis of the state, achieve economic self-discipline and the reconciliation of the interests of the various categories of producers in the service of the nation's interest, without stifling the private economy) as a policy of systematic and programmatic state intervention in the economy aimed at coordinating, regulating, and, in effect, directing production and, in the long term, the country's development and modernization.

In this regard, Bottai's description of the role and functions that the Ministry of Corporations should have assumed is telling:

"The National Council of Corporations," he told the Senate on May 27, 1930, during the debate on the budget of the Ministry of Corporations, "has, according to the law of March 20, 1930, its command center in the office of the Head of Government; but its driving force, and all the levers of its operation, lie within the Ministry of Corporations, so that the Ministry, through the presidency of the Head of Government, occupies a central position in the general administration of the State. The national economy, therefore, finds its center in the Ministry and, through it, takes on a political character.

Hence, the Ministry is an economic ministry, not in the technical sense, but in the political sense of the word—as I just said in the Chamber—the Ministry of the regime's economic policy. The economy has extremely important and varied implications in all the other ministries and in some individually, which reflect issues of particular economic significance. But there is no issue concerning the Italian economy that, while falling under the jurisdiction of various ministries from a technical standpoint, does not ultimately fall under the political jurisdiction of the Ministry of Corporations.

In light of statements of this kind, it is clear that, in Bottai's conception, the Ministry of Corporations was intended to function as a true ministry of economic planning.

Likewise, there is no doubt that—again according to Bottai—the measures the state was implementing during this period to assist struggling businesses could not be ends in themselves, but were granted and utilized based on criteria aimed at strengthening and rationalizing future economic activity.

Also during the debate on the budget of the Ministry of Corporations on May 20, 1930, in the Chamber

of Deputies, Bottai said the following on this matter:

The duration of the crisis—whether short or long—will depend, to a large extent, on our directives and on how well they align with our capabilities and the needs of the situation. These directives call for action by the government, by individual producers, and by professional and economic organizations.

It is the government's responsibility to create the most favorable conditions for private initiative to flourish, setting limits only to prevent it from degenerating into personal arbitrariness, which disrupts the balance of necessary national solidarity… I believe it is time to reach a consensus on this point: direct state intervention in economic production—whether in the form of control or direct management—is, as stated in Declaration IX of the Charter of Labor, of an exceptional nature; and its intervention in the form of encouragement must likewise be of an exceptional nature. It must be said, to the fearful defenders of private enterprise—who are under no illusion that anyone intends to violate this principle—that the Fascist State has never failed to adhere to this rule, whether through controls or direct management. It has only ever provided encouragement. For it often happens that the very same people who cry scandal at the possible applications of Article 12 of the Law of the Council of Corporations ask to be "encouraged"—that is, supported—by that very state intervention which they deplore in theory but seek in practice.

It is indeed appropriate to say that these people view state intervention as a form of encouragement… to commit crimes.

And it must be added that, far from stifling it, it is precisely private initiative that the State is counting on to overcome the crisis and to strengthen our economic activity in the future… But I would add that it would be a grave error to consider the effort needed to overcome the current adverse phase of the economic cycle as an end in itself—that is, destined to come to an end with the conclusion of that phase.

Instead, these energies must be, so to speak, "consolidated."

It is in the nature of cyclical economic fluctuations to lay the groundwork for the next upswing during the downturn and for the next downturn during the upswing.

We must not only emerge from the storm (a fate we share with other nations), but also prepare to walk along the shore with a swift and determined stride, to remedy and counteract the ills caused by our

belated entry into the international arena, as well as the boldness of younger nations—especially those of the American continent—who are formidably battle-hardened.

The problem to be solved is that of our economic efficiency.

As a young nation in economic terms, with a population still growing but with a meager legacy of wealth from past generations, we must maximize the productivity of our labor and production capacity.

We have dwelled on the position of Bottai and those fascists who moved in his orbit not because it was the only one to emerge during this period, nor, much less, because of the actual influence it wielded.

During the years in question, the corporatist agenda and, more generally, the problems of the Italian economy were undoubtedly viewed and debated from other perspectives as well—often quite different from Bottai's; nor did this perspective succeed in establishing itself, either in terms of public opinion (which, on the contrary, was flooded with a whole series of corporatist theories—sometimes convoluted and detached from reality, or offering nothing new compared to traditional liberal or protectionist positions except for the misleading use of generic corporatist rhetoric) or at the political level (so much so that Bottai had only a minimal impact on the regime's political decisions and was soon even removed from the government).

It is a fact, however, that if Fascism during this period truly mobilized a certain amount of energy and aroused, in some sectors of the intellectual and technical world (and among a few rare entrepreneurs or bureaucrats more open to the problems of economic and social development) and especially among young people, a certain genuine support for itself, certain hopes, and even a certain enthusiasm, this was due in large part precisely to the influence of Bottai's position, which—therefore—must be considered one of the factors that—at least in these sectors—contributed most to generating the support that the regime undoubtedly enjoyed during those very years (and its decline, or its shift toward other aspects of the regime's reality—more emotional and evading the country's concrete problems—coincided, not by chance, with the recognition of the failure of Botta's political hypothesis).

Nor, furthermore, can we underestimate the fact that if corporatism—and, by extension, fascism—enjoyed a certain prestige abroad in the first half of the 1930s (as was typically the case in the United States), this was due in large part precisely to the influence exerted in certain circles by Botta's corporatist theory, to which these same circles often linked the subsequent experience of the IRI.

And now we come to Mussolini. To understand the Duce's attitude toward the new situation brought about by the Great Depression and its repercussions on the Italian economy in general and on his ruralization programs in particular, it is necessary first of all to make it clear that—contrary to what has sometimes been claimed—there is no doubt that Mussolini realized very early on not only the severity of the crisis and its fundamental difference from the usual cyclical crises, but also of the fact that its course would be a long one (on October 1, 1930, at the National Council of Corporations, he warned

that the “recovery cycle” could not be less than three years) and would require the regime to commit considerable energy and resources to address it without political repercussions.

In addition to this first point, it is also necessary to clarify a second, equally important point in order to understand Mussolini’s policy during this period: faced with the severity and anticipated duration of the crisis, as well as the potential political dangers, Mussolini soon found himself forced to scale back his previous rural development programs and, in particular, to intervene on behalf of struggling industries; however, this must by no means lead one to believe that his rural policy was set aside or even abandoned.

Deep down, Mussolini probably never gave up on this policy—certainly not during the years under consideration—and, in fact, saw him become increasingly convinced that the root causes of the global crisis were supercapitalism and its inability to prevent the breakdown of the balance between production (unlimited and uncontrolled) and consumption (limited), and that if Italy, compared to other countries, was relatively less affected by the crisis, this was due to the fact that its economy was not yet predominantly industrial.

Hence—at least in the very early stages of the crisis—his reluctance to intervene to help businesses “that did not have sufficiently strong foundations.”

This, above all, explains why he remained steadfast in his conviction that Italy should remain “a mixed-economy nation” and that—despite all the difficulties, and indeed, precisely because of them—it was necessary not to abandon the policy of ruralization, which he increasingly viewed as the only one capable, on the one hand, of preventing the country from sliding down the slope of supercapitalism and, on the other hand, of increasing the population and thus consumer spending power.

And this even at the cost of having to bear the negative social costs of such a policy for a long time, such as chronic industrial unemployment.

The crisis had arrived, he wrote in early July 1933 on this subject, reiterating even in the title the concept of the need for a “Return to the Land”:

Are those vast masses of former farmers and former residents of small rural villages likely to be reabsorbed into an industrial recovery? The prospects are entirely uncertain. We must resign ourselves to enduring a more or less severe rate of chronic unemployment. Is it possible to bring this mass of former farmers—who abandoned their villages—back to them? It is possible, but we must not harbor many illusions.

Only those who have moved to the cities in recent years—only those who were caught by the crisis before they had even adopted a city mindset—may still feel a longing to return to the countryside. Those who have settled in the cities for over a decade, even if they wished to, could no longer return, given the network of interests, acquaintances, and new family ties that have overshadowed the old ones. Only those who still possess a rural mindset can return, and even then, they must have been driven and disheartened by many years of unemployment and poverty.

In Italy, since 1926, I have adopted drastic measures to reduce the population density of large urban agglomerations, but the results—though encouraging, given the discipline of the people and the energy with which Fascist ordinances are enforced—are far from having eliminated the phenomenon.

Naturally, I will continue this policy, but where I expect to achieve—and have already achieved—the most fruitful results is in the other program aimed at keeping rural dwellers on the land.

In light of this enduring Mussolini-style ruralism, it is highly significant that, as late as 1935—in a situation that was by then entirely different— Gino Olivetti—one of the most influential figures in the industrial world, who was certainly no stranger to the Duce's positions—felt the need, while discussing the relationship between agriculture and industry in Italy, to take up the cudgels in defense of industry and, in particular, of the need for its "parallel" development alongside that of agriculture, and had to resort to all sorts of arguments to support this thesis, ranging from the seemingly most obvious to those most likely to make an impression on Mussolini—from the claim that the improvement in the living conditions of the masses "is far more attributable to industrial development than to agricultural activity" to the assertion that "only a strong and comprehensive industrial base can today enable a nation to provide for its own defense in the event of armed conflict."

Finally, a third point to clarify at the outset concerns Mussolini's stance on the issue of state intervention in the economy and, consequently, on the trends we have seen emerging during this period in certain Fascist political circles in favor of a "planned" economy.

Mussolini's statements on the matter are, in truth, neither numerous nor very explicit; moreover, the most significant ones do not refer directly to the Italian situation, but draw inspiration either from reading some new book or from examining other contexts, generally that of the United States; nevertheless, it seems to us that certain underlying motivations can be discerned quite clearly.

In general terms, it can be said that Mussolini, while completely alien to any genuine anti-capitalist sentiment and having no intention whatsoever of attempting to alter the private-sector structure of the Italian economy (an undertaking for which, moreover, he would not even have had the political power to do so), he was by no means hostile to the idea of extending state control to the economic sphere as well—and above all to banking and big industry (toward small and medium-sized enterprises, his attitude was largely different, since he saw them as the product of one of the "healthiest" sectors of Italian society, an expression of the most positive traits of the Italian "race"—enterprising spirit, tenacity, the spirit of sacrifice, simplicity, and a realistic sense of work).

He must have already set out on this path during the era of the "ninety percent quota" and the power struggle he had to endure to impose it: even then, his old mistrust of big industry—and above all of "high finance"—must have been reawakened, while his more recent sympathies (whether sincere or merely instrumental is difficult to say) for the "Manchesterian state" must have waned considerably.

Nor, in the period leading up to the crisis, could certain reservations on the part of the industrial world regarding the policy of ruralization—and certain rumors circulating even abroad, in major and reputable newspapers, concerning the discontent that his policy was arousing in financial and business circles—have certainly helped to dispel his misgivings; all the more so since these misgivings were kept alive not only by some intransigent fascists and trade unionists, but even by the very few men "without a care in the world" in whom Mussolini placed absolute trust, such as his brother Arnaldo.

It is therefore easy to understand why—once the crisis struck—faced with the economic sector's unease, its increasingly numerous, pressing, and never-satisfied demands for measures in its favor, and its "discreet" (but no less insistent) criticisms of the regime's economic policy (especially regarding finance and public works), Mussolini was increasingly inclined to view all of this, on the one hand, as the result of selfishness, insensitivity, ingratitude, and a lack of loyalty to the regime, and, on the other hand, as evidence of an inability to understand that the old criteria of economic management were by then largely obsolete—and thus to become convinced of the need to exercise greater control over economic life, to "bring it into line" with the regime's policies and even—according to an expression of his that, as we shall see, caused quite a stir—to "break down the barriers of interest formed by groups and individuals" that stood in the way of such policies.

In this context, the opinions that Mussolini expressed (often anonymously) in the columns of *Il Popolo d'Italia* on certain books dealing with the international economic situation and the policies implemented in other countries—particularly the United States—to overcome the crisis provide important insights for reconstructing his position and for assessing whether his interventions in the Italian economy reflected a coherent underlying vision of the situation and the means to control it, or whether they were merely part of an emergency response and a series of measures taken on a case-by-case basis to plug the most serious gaps.

These writings show that, for Mussolini, the liberal economy had by then run its course and that it was necessary to establish a "new economy," one that was as far removed from "the uncontrolled and anarchic economy of the individual" as it was from one "monopolized by the state."

Private property was not to be called into question; as for private initiative, it too was to be respected as far as possible; "but the exercise of the right to property cannot be divorced from the general interest": "the state cannot remain indifferent to the fate of the economy, because that would be tantamount to remaining indifferent to the fate of the people."

These latter statements, significant in and of themselves, take on even greater significance given their specific context: a broad and highly favorable exposition of general economic issues and the cornerstones of Roosevelt's policy of programmatic intervention, as outlined by Roosevelt himself in his *Looking Forward*.

These and other positions taken by Mussolini (confirmed by the testimonies of some of his closest collaborators during those years) leave virtually no doubt as to the Duce's intention and determination to implement in Italy as well a policy of increasing state intervention in the economy and, in the long term, control over some of its key mechanisms (indispensable, among other things, for a revival of the ruralization policy).

At this point, however, a question arises that cannot be left unanswered: why, if he was clearly in favor of a policy of intervention (and, more importantly, implementing it on a large scale), did Mussolini never embark on the path (along which even the most dynamic wing of Fascism would have followed

him enthusiastically) of genuine planning of interventions and setting of objectives to be achieved (he, above all, who loved to tackle certain problems as so many “battles” and mobilize the entire propaganda apparatus of the regime around them), preferring instead to resort to a series of measures, albeit highly significant ones—one need only think of the establishment of IMI and IRI—but which, on the surface and in many cases essentially ad hoc, were often poorly coordinated and at times contradictory, to the point of giving the impression that they were adopted more in response to needs dictated by the urgency of the crisis than according to a conscious overall strategy?

Why did he not support Bottai and, in seeking to establish the corporatist system, fail to make it an effective instrument for controlling and planning the economy, as the Minister of Corporations would have wanted?

In our view, there are three types of answers to this question, all equally important and none of which can be overlooked: a political answer, a psychological answer, and an ideological answer.

The political answer brings us back to the issue of the internal balances within the fascist regime.

Although the regime had by then been significantly strengthened over the course of about a decade and had gradually acquired ever-greater margins of autonomy, its foundations still rested on certain fundamental compromises that constituted its center of gravity; if necessary, the Duce could scale back this or that component of the regime, reducing its overall influence and scope of autonomy (this was the fate that befell the Church in 1931 during the crisis over Catholic Action); he could alter the influence of a component, undermining its internal cohesion and thereby causing a decrease in its bargaining power; he could even engineer a sort of rotation of influence and use it to satisfy various needs in turn; in doing so, he could slowly erode ever-new spheres of power to his own advantage and, above all, increasingly reaffirm his role as the sole indispensable arbiter and the deciding factor in the system; he could do all this, but he could not undermine the general equilibrium upon which the system itself was founded.

In this situation, a head-on clash with the major economic forces was virtually unthinkable.

And it was even more so at a time of crisis—that is, at a time when Mussolini wanted above all to avoid a traumatic worsening of the economic crisis (to cope with which the state budget had by then reached the breaking point and would therefore be unable to bear new massive burdens) and its transformation into a social and political crisis; at a time, moreover, when his political horizon—as we shall see in the next chapter—was expanding more and more to include international issues, and the need for him to avoid divisions within the country and the regime at all costs was therefore growing.

Given these circumstances, and knowing full well that the business community—despite all its “discontent” and all its criticism of the regime’s economic policy—needed the state’s direct and indirect support and had not the slightest intention of changing horses midstream, Mussolini found it far more preferable, rather than engaging in a head-on confrontation with it, a policy of creeping intervention and control, implemented gradually as opportunities and needs arose; with the dual advantage, moreover, of presenting it to those directly affected as a sacrifice made by the state to accommodate them (it is significant that the IRI, at the time of its establishment, was presented as a provisional institution) and thus asking them something in return, and to the country as a sacrifice made to save the national economy—and thus, on the one hand, to ask the country to bear the costs and, on the other hand, to be able to psychologically mobilize it in case of need against the “selfishness” and “lack of social sensitivity” of the financial sector and big industry.

A typical example of this is the speech Mussolini delivered on October 25, 1931, in Naples, during which he said:

And how much more time must pass before we are convinced that something in the economic system of the contemporary world has run aground and perhaps broken down?… In domestic politics, the watchword is this: to move decisively toward the people, to concretely realize our economic civilization, which is far removed from the monopolistic aberrations of Bolshevism, but also from the well-documented shortcomings of the liberal economy. We have nothing to fear. The plutocracies of other countries have too many domestic problems to concern themselves with our issues and the further development we wish to give to our revolution. If there were any obstacles seeking to interrupt this direct communion between the regime and the people—obstacles arising from the interests of groups and individuals—we would, in the supreme interest of the nation, break them down!

The global crisis—which is no longer merely economic but is now, above all, spiritual and moral—must not leave us in a state of apathy and inertia: the greater the obstacles, the more precise and direct our determination to overcome them must be.

Demagoguery aside, what is most striking about this speech—and, indeed, was widely reported by the regime's press—is the reference to the barriers that allegedly sought to impede the regime's march toward the people.

For several days, this was the focus of endless commentary that gave the impression we were on the eve of a "turning point" in the regime's economic policy; among these comments were some that were quite harsh toward the "wealthy classes," big business, and the banking sector—all identified as the "barriers" the Duce had spoken of.

Then, almost as suddenly as it had begun, the uproar subsided, and with it any mention of a possible "turning point" in the regime's economic policy.

In the meantime, however, three events had taken place that clearly explain the reason behind Mussolini's threatening remark and the press campaign orchestrated around it: on October 30, the Central Corporate Committee, meeting under Mussolini's chairmanship, had authorized certain wage adjustments; on November 4, the complete divestiture of the industrial stock portfolio held by Banca Commerciale and its transfer to a parastatal entity, Sofindit, had been announced: a classic bailout operation, which, however, had provoked resistance and opposition right up to the very end, and which politically foreshadowed the dismantling of the autonomy of Banca Commerciale (and other major banks of national interest) and of its managing director, G. Toeplitz, who was as powerful as he was hated by broad sectors of the Fascist movement; Finally, on November 9, the Istituto Mobiliare Italiano (IMI) was established—marking the most significant act to date regarding state intervention in the economy; so significant and controversial that when, the following month, the board of directors of the

new institution took office, its chairman, T. Mayer, could not help but allude to the “many misunderstandings” to which the creation of the IMI had given rise (“there had even been talk of a process of nationalization of industries”), and Mussolini hastened to clarify:

To view the Istituto Mobiliare Italiano as an instrument created to promote catastrophic transformations in the economic structure of Italian society is absurd, but to view the Istituto Mobiliare Italiano as a means to vigorously steer the Italian economy toward the corporatist phase is accurate: it is a system that fundamentally respects private property and private initiative, but also seeks to integrate them within the State, which alone can protect, control, and invigorate both.

Nor can this be considered a special case; if anything, it was merely the most sensational one.

In fact, if one closely examines Mussolini’s main public statements and the most sensational press campaigns on economic matters during this period and correlates them with the most significant government initiatives on the same subject, it is not difficult to discern a consistent modus operandi, even if—depending on the case—it is more or less evident.

Mussolini would raise a general issue, dramatizing its importance and gravity, without, however, specifying its precise terms or concrete solutions, and sometimes making a vague but threatening allusion to unspecified interests and groups that would oppose his solution.

Based on these words from the Duce, the regime’s press would launch its usual campaign, and some newspapers went so far as to identify who the opponents would be.

Only after this preparatory intimidation campaign would the announcement of new measures generally be made (often finalized precisely at the height of the media campaign).

It is certainly not without significance that in April 1935—with the crisis now behind them and a new phase having begun in relations between the regime and the business community—Vittorio Cini (one of the most influential representatives of the Italian business community and, at the same time, one of those closest to the regime) felt the need to voice a protest in the Senate, one that was timid and made after the fact, but no less revealing for that, against the “unfavorable judgments” that had been circulated in previous years “against the productive sectors and particularly the industrial ones.”

And that he did so in the context of a speech whose central theme was essentially the fate of the industries transferred to the IRI, for which he called, without mincing words, for “their return to the private sector” in the name—formally—of the State’s interest (“the State, freed from all constraints, will be better able to fulfill its role as the supreme regulator of the economy, resolving the current conflict of often being both judge and party to the measures it is called upon to take”—in reality, in the name of defending the new line on which the majority of the industrial world had by then been forced to take a stand: state intervention ‘in the form of discipline and control’ could be accepted (albeit by making a virtue of necessity), but state intervention ‘in the form of management’ could not.

What we have said seems to explain why Mussolini spoke relatively little about the policy of state intervention in the economy and, when he did speak of it, did so in fairly general terms, citing vague social and national justifications and, above all, presenting it as a practice that was essentially extraordinary and temporary, imposed by the gravity of the situation; yet, at the same time, he pursued a policy of progressively expanding state intervention.

It does not, however, explain, on the one hand, the lack of coherence in this policy and, on the other hand, why the most significant interventions were not integrated in any way into the framework of the corporatist system—a system that, during that very same period, was being painstakingly attempted to be established and which, logically, should first and foremost have extended its jurisdiction to those sectors of the national economy controlled by the state in various ways, so as to make them the testing ground for the corporatist system's renewing function and the driving force behind national economic development.

The explanation for this aspect of Mussolini's policy is, in our view, partly political and partly psychological.

It is political insofar as it stems from the Duce's desire to prevent the interventionist measures being implemented from—if entrusted to the corporative bodies for their execution—being viewed not as extraordinary and provisional but as conforming to corporative logic and, therefore, could further unsettle the economic world (already sufficiently concerned about fascism's corporatist aims, the initial steps of the related legal framework, and the tendency and pressures from certain fascist circles to view certain "bailouts" as the precursors to implementing a policy of corporatist planning) and cause it to become even more rigid;

b) to ensure that the measures adopted would possess the functionality, timeliness, and flexibility of implementation that Mussolini believed they could derive from being entrusted, as appropriate, either to institutions created ad hoc or to the bureaucracy of traditional state administrations (which were exclusively dependent on the central government and protective of their own prerogatives), whereas he feared that—if entrusted to corporate bodies (which, moreover, were not yet well defined or organized) —their implementation would likely be not only less prompt and effective but also threatened by the danger of paralyzing conflicts of interest arising within them;

c) to avoid granting what he considered to be excessive power to the corporative bodies and thereby laying the groundwork for the hollowing out of the fascist state in favor of the corporative state—a dualism that would have diminished central powers in favor of peripheral and sectoral institutions and interests;

d) to prevent the emergence, even in Italy, of a technocracy (in a corporatist guise), which would inevitably have sought to seize control of the state for itself.

The explanation, however, is more properly psychological when one considers that, alongside these political motivations, there was also a substantial—albeit obviously undeclared—uncertainty on Mussolini's part regarding the actual significance that the corporatist system was supposed to assume within the regime's structure (and, therefore, on how to implement it and what powers to grant it) and, more generally, on the fundamental direction to be given to the regime's new economic policy.

Psychologically and personally—as has been noted—Mussolini had become increasingly withdrawn and isolated from everyone; at the same time, his distrust, skepticism, and lack of confidence in people

had grown, as had the belief that the entire structure of the regime and the fate of Italy depended solely on him, and, in addition to this, the conviction that his instinct was as infallible regarding the masses as it was prone to error when it came to individual people.

His loneliness and this psychological state intensified even further after his brother Arnaldo died at the end of 1931.

Deprived of his brother's discreet but constant support, the pressure of having to provide for everything, of having to know and control everything, and of being unable to make any mistakes became a defining and characteristic trait of Mussolini's personality; a trait that drove him increasingly to exploit the charm and influence he knew he exerted over men and crowds and to display great self-assurance, but, at the same time, to proceed with great caution, leaving open (as long as he could) as many escape routes as possible—especially in those matters—such as the economy—that were more technical and therefore less familiar to him, yet whose enormous importance he understood for the sake of his power and prestige.

All the more so because, by constantly seeking information, reading, listening to the most diverse and often conflicting people and viewpoints, and taking note of their various concerns, he inevitably ended up being influenced by their contradictions and irreconcilability and, consequently, he found himself increasingly unable both to form his own firm opinion and to rely on anyone else's judgment—especially that of politicians or men who were directly involved in the economic world and who, for that very reason, aroused his distrust.

Hence, therefore, his uncertainties regarding the policy to follow and, consequently, his psychological as well as political reluctance to decisively embark on a specific path and, even more so, to venture into the realm of explicit planning of interventions; hence, on the other hand, his tendency to proceed with caution and through individual measures (ones that were not overly demanding in terms of overall direction and that could be presented, depending on the circumstances, from different perspectives), to limit as much as possible the decision-making autonomy of the bodies responsible for economic policy, effectively reserving control over them for himself, and, finally, to rely, for the implementation of his directives, not so much on politicians of a certain stature as on figures whom, rightly or wrongly, he regarded as pure technocrats—capable but lacking political clout of their own, less tied to the major "economic circles," and substantially less inclined to stray beyond their areas of expertise into "big politics."

It is obviously impossible to draw a clear distinction in Mussolini's economic policy between the influence of these psychological motivations and those that are, instead, more strictly political.

However, it does not seem far-fetched to see their reflection in various manifestations that are most characteristic of it; to cite just three major examples, it seems to us, for instance, that their reflection can be seen:

a) in Mussolini's substantial refusal to define the characteristics of the corporatist system and in his insistence on asserting that what was being done in the corporatist sphere was experimental;

b) in the care he took to make the figure of the Head of Government the cornerstone of the corporatist system itself—at least as it took shape from 1930 to 1934—so as to grant him the maximum powers, control, and authority (for example, with regard to economic regulation) over the principal corporatist acts;

c) by gradually sidelining all those fascists who had their own clear stance on corporatist and economic issues and enjoyed personal prestige (Turati in 1930, Rocco and Bottai in 1932, Arpinati in 1933) and, instead, in relying on men of undoubted merit who certainly did not focus primarily on the development of corporatist policy (typical examples being Jung and Beneduce) and who, as "pure technocrats," Mussolini believed would manage the Italian economy according to purely technical criteria, leaving to him (who, not coincidentally, when he dismissed Bottai personally resumed the Ministry of Corporations) the task of steering corporatist policy as political circumstances and the demands of his power best required.

In this sense, it is extremely significant that when he made the decision to establish the IRI—that is, at the moment of launching the most important economic policy initiative of those years—he was motivated solely by economic considerations and did not give the slightest thought to establishing a connection between the initiative he was undertaking and corporatist policy.

This is evidenced by the letter he wrote on January 9, 1933 (the IRI was established on January 23 of that year) to Finance Minister Jung to summarize their previous conversations on the matter and provide him with final directives.

The letter shows that Mussolini expected the establishment of the IRI (referred to as the IFI in the letter) to bring about a "turning point" in the economic and industrial situation; he would have liked the new institution to be even broader in scope than it ultimately was; and—contrary to what was claimed due to obvious political concerns—he did not consider it a provisional measure at all.

On the other hand, there is absolutely no mention of any form of connection to corporatist politics. Nor does it seem plausible to us that there was any deliberate self-censorship on this point, given the highly confidential yet explicit nature of the letter. Nor, for that matter, do the subsequent developments regarding the IRI show any trace of a desire on Mussolini's part to establish such a connection.

At this point, to complete the analysis of Mussolini's attitude toward economic problems during the period under consideration, we must pause for a moment to examine what we have termed the ideological explanation for the reasons that led the Duce not to pursue a path of full-fledged planning and programming of public interventions.

Otherwise, given what we have said about the political and psychological motivations, one might even come to believe that Mussolini essentially did not believe in corporatism and merely proclaimed its necessity for demagogic and power-seeking purposes.

On the contrary, it is beyond doubt and widely documented that Mussolini was a staunch advocate of the "corporate system" and considered it the only system capable of avoiding the contradictions typical of "supercapitalism" without thereby having to resort to a communist solution and, at the same time, capable of establishing "the path of agreement and balance" among the various social categories of producers and between them and the State—which, in turn, represented consumers—and, therefore, the indispensable prerequisite for a new political system that was truly "democratic" and "representative."

However, this conviction clashed within him not only with his "psychological" uncertainties and fears and his contingent "political" necessities, but also with another of his typical convictions, this time of an "ideological" in nature, which, moreover, grew stronger within him during the years of the "Great Crisis" in parallel with his growing conviction that the crisis was not within the system but was

inherent in the existing capitalist system.

As we have seen elsewhere, Mussolini had been reading Nietzsche since his youth and had become enthusiastic about his thought.

As time went on, his passion for the German philosopher had not diminished; on the contrary, Nietzsche's thought—or at least certain aspects of it—had become one of the most characteristic components of Mussolini's culture and personality, thanks in part—precisely during the period that concerns us here—to Spengler's influence.

Beyond the theory of the function of personality and its creative power, what had struck Mussolini most about Nietzsche was his notion of civilization, his way of thinking in terms of civilization, and the idea that a civilization creates, above all, a "way of life."

Whether consciously or not (though it is significant that it was precisely during this period that Mussolini resumed writing about Nietzsche and even proclaimed himself his "disciple"), this idea of civilization became increasingly decisive and influential in him during the years of the "great crisis." If the crisis was systemic, "then we are facing a transition from one era of civilization to another."

In this case, however, the material initiatives to address the crisis and attempt to steer its course—however necessary they might be—were still insufficient, not truly decisive, and every new arrangement was provisional and partial: the true resolution of the crisis of the system—that is, the birth of a new system—would in fact be realized only within the new civilization, and this would arise not so much from material initiatives as from a moral transformation of humanity, from the emergence of a new "way of life."

Echoes of this ideologization of the "Great Crisis" are not uncommon in Mussolini's writings and speeches (especially those from 1933–34) and are highly significant for us, whether we relate them to Mussolini's broader concept of the "long term"—on which Fascism was to focus and work to shape the new generations—or whether we relate them instead to the specific issue from which we began this digression.

In both cases, they help us understand how, even from an "ideological" perspective, Mussolini was essentially inclined to view the full realization of the corporatist system as a matter for the future ("the entire century lies before us": with these words, on January 13, 1934, he concluded his speech in the Senate on the constitution and functions of the Corporations) rather than a matter of the immediate present (in which the focus was merely on laying the groundwork and experimenting with certain mechanisms, without venturing into hasty and dangerous applications to a transforming economic reality), and more a matter for future generations—shaped according to a true "Fascist way of life"—than for the present ones.

With this final clarification, the outline of the Duce's position regarding the economic and political problems raised by the Great Depression and its repercussions on his original plans seems to us to be essentially complete, just as we believe we have outlined the connection that, for Mussolini, linked the immediately political and socio-economic aspects of his program for the new "cycle of government"—which began in September 1929—to the final point of that same program, which we have yet to discuss: the fascistization of Italian society and the education of the younger generations.

We have left this point until last solely for the sake of clarity, this point is in reality of the utmost

importance, both from the perspective of a comprehensive reconstruction of Mussolini's position and concrete political action and from the more general perspective of understanding the regime's subsequent internal developments and the most real and profound causes of its weakness and crisis—even prior to and apart from those connected to the final developments in Mussolini's politics, namely the alliance with Germany and the war.

From this second perspective, in fact, the manner in which the program of comprehensive fascistization and the education of the younger generations was carried out—and the results achieved—were more significant and fraught with negative consequences for the regime than the failure of Mussolini's ruralization plans, even if the latter may appear more complete.

The failure of the ruralization plans certainly held great significance for Mussolini and undoubtedly helped steer his political strategy toward objectives that, in part, reflected the new international situation brought about by Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933, but were also, in part, the consequence of Mussolini's desire and need to seek, in the realm of foreign policy, a way to make up for the setbacks he had suffered in his efforts to transform the fundamental characteristics of Italian society.

Beyond the Duce's ambitions and plans, however, the economic policy implemented to address the crisis did not weaken the regime; on the contrary, it objectively ended up strengthening it—both because it significantly expanded the state's direct and indirect control over the economy (in 1934, Mussolini went so far as to say that "three-quarters of Italy's industrial and agricultural economy is in the hands of the state": a statement that was certainly exaggerated but reflected an awareness of what would become evident to everyone within a couple of years—namely, that the Italian state now "owned a proportionally larger share of industry than any other European state, with the exception of the Soviet Union" and controlled a vast portion of the national credit system), both because it effectively helped the Italian economy make that qualitative leap that finally allowed it to take on a modern and progressive character—indispensable, whatever Mussolini might have thought, not only for the country's actual future and civil progress but also to make Mussolini's very claim that Fascist Italy should play the role of a "great power" seem somewhat plausible in the eyes of the world.

By contrast, the policy of fascistizing Italian society—while yielding results that appeared to correspond much more closely to the intentions and programs actually implemented by Mussolini—proved far more disastrous for the regime and fraught with negative consequences.

If one looks beyond appearances, the results achieved by this policy were, in fact, not only less totalitarian than what fascism seemed at first glance to have accomplished, but—more importantly—they were so superficial and conditioned by a whole series of contingent and practical motivations that, when put to the test, proved to be largely only temporary and transitory, exposed to all the risks and setbacks typical of a essentially traditional consensus, founded, in fact, almost exclusively on contingent and practical motivations and/or on momentary psychological reactions, without even a modicum of roots in awareness or faith.

At the time, this type of support may well have sufficed for Mussolini, especially since the Duce—as has been noted—in his skepticism and his by then a priori and substantial contempt for the Italians of his time, focused above all on the younger generations, convinced that he could mold them according to the true "Fascist style."

At the time, in fact, this type of consensus provided Mussolini and the regime with the essential

precondition for weathering the crisis and carrying out, to the extent possible under the circumstances, their short-term political programs, without too many domestic concerns.

Soon, however, the inadequacy, precariousness, and objective and political limitations of this consensus began to be recognized with increasing clarity, and with them the dangers it posed to the regime—not only in the present but above all in the very future onto which Mussolini sought to project and fully realize his vision.

To shape the new generations, it was still necessary (leaving aside other equally fundamental considerations that did not fit within Mussolini's sensibilities and logic) to have a ruling class that, for better or worse, met the needs of the cause, believed in it, and, therefore, could take upon itself—with a certain degree of conviction and enthusiasm—the task of educating young people according to a truly Fascist moral, cultural, and political vision and "way of life."

Fascism, however, essentially lacked such a ruling class, and—what was worse—the evidence showed that the regime—despite all its efforts—was not only incapable of creating it but was itself the primary and therefore insurmountable cause of this inability.

Hence the regime's tragedy and its most profound and effective condemnation to self-destruction, even before and regardless of what later became the "external" causes of its downfall (which those causes brought forward in time and made more dramatic but which, had they not occurred, would not have prevented the outcome; it would simply have taken different forms); hence, too, the regime's progressive and growing struggle to extricate itself from this situation, resorting to solutions and measures that, on the contrary, only exacerbated it further and made it more precarious, even in terms of public support.

And from this, finally, arises the historical necessity to understand why, despite being favored by the existence of an undoubted—albeit superficial—mass consensus and by the availability of all the necessary tools to, on the one hand, stimulate the growth of this consensus and, on the other hand, to crush or at least contain active dissent within manageable limits, the regime failed to capitalize on this situation—which seemed so favorable to it—in terms of creating its own political class and, on closer inspection, essentially ended up failing much sooner among those bourgeois classes that were supposed to be its stronghold than among the working and peasant classes.

The regime had numerous tools at its disposal to fascistize Italian society; some were more specifically targeted (schools, mass organizations, labor unions, the PNF), while others, rather than targeting individual categories of citizens, acted—if one may say so—on the broader environment, that is, they strove to create and constantly maintain a certain general "atmosphere" in harmony with Mussolini's policies.

Among the latter, we must certainly include the police forces, the Carabinieri, the OVRA, and the MVSN, which were responsible for the preventive and repressive aspects of the work required to create and sustain this general atmosphere—and which carried out these duties with a zeal and efficiency that it would be wrong to judge solely on the basis of their most sensational actions, since these were certainly no more important than their routine activities (surveillance of public places, of those in internal exile, of those who had received warnings, of those under caution, of various types of persons under surveillance, and of suspects in general; searches; information gathering; relations with informants; interception of clandestine publications and suspicious correspondence; removal of "seditious" graffiti, etc.), of which they were, in fact, very often the consequence; at this point in our

discussion, however, the repressive aspect of “consensus” must, so to speak, remain in the background; for there is no doubt that, at the mass level, while it had an importance that cannot be underestimated, it was far less significant than what we might call the formation and mobilization of consensus—indispensable prerequisites for a profound process of fascistization. In this sense, the most important task was carried out by the press and, as they were developed, by radio broadcasts.

Aware of the great importance the press would have for its political aims, the regime had turned its “vigilant attention” to it very early on.

The repressive measures against press freedom in 1925 and 1926—through which the anti-fascist press was first virtually silenced and eventually completely suppressed—were merely the first steps on the path toward the fascistization of the press.

Even after the anti-fascist press had been suppressed, many newspapers still eluded the direct control of the fascist regime, including some with substantial circulations.

Hence the need for the regime to implement a whole series of economic and political maneuvers to gain direct control over these newspapers or, at any rate, to secure effective political control over them, and, at the same time, to eliminate politically opposed or disloyal elements from journalistic activity and replace them with fascists.

In the late 1920s, commenting on this “journalistic revolution,” the secretary of the National Fascist Union of Journalists, Ermanno Amicucci, described the new reality of the Italian press less than three years after the “crackdown” of late 1926 as follows:

Naturally, the new legal framework imposed by Fascism on the Italian press inevitably brought about a veritable “journalistic revolution.” To build—as in all other fields—the Regime had to first destroy, even in journalism.

The newspapers and journalists that had emerged and operated according to the principles of the press’s omnipotence—above and against the State, above and against society—had to disappear or submit to the new order.

Newspapers that fought against the State no longer had the freedom to carry out their nefarious anti-national activities.

Journalists who considered themselves the untouchable despots of the infamous “fourth estate” were forced to lay down their pens. Many newspapers have disappeared. Many journalists who, under the old regime, wielded the greatest—and almost always pernicious—influence in Italian political life have been barred from practicing their profession. Some newspapers and journalists associated with liberalism and democracy, however, having understood the new tasks imposed on the press by Fascism,

have aligned themselves with Fascist reality and discipline.

This does not mean, however, that the Italian press is entirely Fascist. The regime permits, for example, the publication in Genoa of a newspaper such as *Lavoro*, which is the voice of a group of former leaders of the General Confederation of Labor who have accepted the new order, recognizing its historical significance, without, however, joining the ranks of Fascist organizations. Nor are the newspapers of the National Center and Catholic Action fascist, although they are loyal supporters of the regime.

The “journalistic revolution” has given rise to a national press, which operates within the sphere of the State and naturally subjects its activities to the State’s control and directives, and a fascist press, which is a political instrument of the Regime—a ready, reliable, and formidable weapon of the Fascist Revolution.

In December 1927, when the Grand Council addressed the relationship between the press and the Regime, it reaffirmed the educational function of the press and the need for it to be permeated and shaped by the fascist spirit, albeit with the necessary differences.

The Party’s “Foglio d’Ordini,” commenting on the resolutions of the Fascist Grand Council regarding the issue of the press, wrote precisely that the press, like the school, must become an instrument of the Regime.

This picture—already quite eloquent in itself—could be supplemented with a whole series of other elements. For the sake of brevity, however, we will limit ourselves to citing only a few passages from the speech delivered by Mussolini on October 10, 1928, to seventy editors-in-chief of the regime’s daily newspapers, who had been summoned to Rome to receive directly from the Duce the directives to which they were to “align” their activities; these passages, in fact, clearly reveal what Mussolini considered to be the press’s task and how he intended it to be carried out.

Its primary task was to constitute “a force at the service of the regime.” On this point, Mussolini was uncompromising:

In a totalitarian regime… the press is an element of that regime, a force at the service of that regime; in a unitary regime, the press cannot be alien to that unity. That is why the entire Italian press is fascist and must take pride in marching in unison under the banner of the Lictor.

Starting from this indisputable fact, one immediately has a compass for guiding the practical activity of Fascist journalism: what is not useful is avoided, and what is useful to the regime is done. It follows that, above all—and we might even say exclusively—in Italy, unlike in other countries, journalism, more than a profession or trade, becomes a mission of great and delicate importance; for in the modern age, after the school system educates the rising generations, it is journalism that circulates among the masses and carries out its work of informing and educating them.

From this perspective, the press was to devote itself above all to the "various and major aspects and problems" of the lives of individuals and the people, and to prepare the country to embrace the regime's grand initiatives; the rest was frivolous, stale, useless, and harmful.

Attentive and highly sensitive as he was to the importance and necessity of shaping the public climate, for Mussolini, information—and even more so "criticism" (which, at that time, he claimed not to deny outright, even though he said it should be exercised "to a limited extent" and constructively, and in any case not regarding "strictly political issues" or "those that are fundamental to the revolution") must not "provide fuel for the cause of the adversaries" and must be guided by the awareness of "serving the regime."

Therefore, those journalists who gave too much space to crime reporting were not serving the regime ("there is a perceived need to report that 'a young professor shot his wife,' as if this were of particular interest to humanity at large, beyond the doormen and immediate relatives… crime reporting must be left to the police officers filing reports at the police headquarters, except in special cases where human, social, or political interest prevails"), just as those who "lack discretion, especially regarding foreign policy and finance" did not serve the regime—those who, in controversy, descended "into defamatory and cannibalistic personal attacks," and who indulged in "generic Catoism" and "irresponsible moralizing."

It is easy to imagine what kind of press could emerge from such an approach, and, after all, the best proof of what we are saying lies in the collections of newspapers from that time: a press that, with rare exceptions, addressed only the issues and published only the news that served the regime, which extolled all its initiatives (to the point that Mussolini himself was sometimes forced to intervene to prevent the creation of counterproductive expectations) and daily reinforced the image of an Italian society enthusiastically united behind fascism and the Duce and, despite all the difficulties, always marching toward new political, economic, and civil goals—a society that was orderly, disciplined, and healthy, aware of the difficulties and sacrifices it had to face, but also aware that it enjoyed a better life than that of other countries.

A press, therefore, that—having a virtual monopoly on information (foreign newspapers had a very limited circulation, confined in practice to very small and "responsible" circles and foreign radio stations at that time did not broadcast in Italian), progressively influenced readers, contributed enormously to the fascistization of the country, and, above all, conditioned them to think increasingly only what the regime wanted them to think.

Finally, this press, while essentially fascistized, was not yet 100% so (especially regarding technical issues and culture) and, since it was politically, in part, an expression of certain prominent figures within fascism who had their own personal positions to defend, it could afford a certain margin of maneuver and criticism (even if increasingly "veiled," in a way that was incomprehensible to the mass of readers) and which, therefore, did not entirely exclude a few "different" voices that served as a low-cost outlet and appeased those minorities who would have been offended by absolute polyphonic uniformity and found in these "different" voices a means of satisfying their own critical inclinations and an aristocratic intellectual and moral alibi for their acceptance of the status quo.

It is difficult to imagine a press more in tune with—and, above all, more functional to—the regime's aims; thus, one is certainly not mistaken in asserting that, during the years under consideration, it played a highly significant role in strengthening and expanding support for the regime and the Duce and, consequently, in the fascistization of ever-wider sectors of the country.

Yet it soon appeared to Mussolini to be "out of step" and not sufficiently immersed in the "totalitarian" atmosphere of fascism.

Faced with the persistence—beneath the regime's apparent monolithic nature—of a whole range of ways of understanding fascism and its future developments, with the continued existence of a certain number of "gray areas" (of the apolitical, the "afascists," critics, as well as outright anti-fascists) and, above all, faced with the realization that, while the regime was more or less succeeding in mobilizing and integrating the masses, the elites—and in particular what was supposed to be the new fascist ruling class—were proving largely inadequate for the "historic" task that his programs had assigned them, Mussolini, in the first half of the 1930s (influenced in part by what Nazism was doing in Germany), became convinced that to truly "fascistize" Italy and bring it into line with his policies, it was necessary to move from this type of control and organization of the press to a full-fledged, systematic campaign of mass propaganda, conceived at the center in very close alignment with the regime's political needs and implemented at the periphery with military-style discipline and uniformity through a whole series of propaganda and cultural initiatives organized by specific sectors and levels.

In other words, he became convinced of the need to set the regime on the path toward systematic centralization and direct control of all "mass culture"—or, as it would come to be called, popular culture.

In this new context, the press soon lost almost entirely what little personality and autonomy it had retained during the "journalistic revolution" of previous years; it became, ever more blatantly, merely an instrument of the regime's mass propaganda. The editorial stance of the various newspapers—especially the dailies—on a whole range of issues, political and otherwise, was determined not so much by individual editors (who increasingly rarely dared to take personal positions on issues of some interest and often adapted to the situation through a dismal competition to see who could be the most zealous)—was determined by the Press Office of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (which, not coincidentally, was placed under the direction of the Duce's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, in August 1933), which institutionalized the practice of instructing newspapers via special "veline" (the number of which continued to increase over time) how to "tone down" their commentary, which news stories to highlight, which to publish or not, and even what kind of headlines to use.

Having set out on this path, in the years that followed the regime would pursue it to the very end, perhaps deluding itself—and certainly giving the impression to many—that it was capable of imposing

its totalitarian will not only on its opponents but also on the fascists themselves.

Leaving aside for the moment an examination of the actual results thus achieved (beyond the obvious and most striking—but also least conclusive—one of eliminating dissenting voices and presenting a consistently unambiguous and enthusiastic picture of Italian reality and Mussolini's politics), it seems difficult to deny, however, that by taking this path, the Duce implicitly acknowledged that theprocess of fascistization he had undertaken—despite some undoubted positive results—was not proceeding according to his intentions, was failing to become truly totalitarian, and, what was more serious, that in order to push it further forward, it was not possible to rely on the awareness and sense of responsible participation of the fascists, but rather one had to resort to bureaucratic and essentially coercive systems directed precisely against the fascist ruling class itself.

Having said this in general terms, for a more concrete and detailed assessment of the results of the fascistization policy implemented by Mussolini, it is necessary to broaden the discussion and pause for a moment to examine what we have defined as the specific tools available to the regime for fascistizing Italian society and, therefore, the particular contexts they affected.

And this is true even though we are well aware that each of these areas would require a dedicated study —which, of course, is not possible here—and that, therefore, our discussion can only serve as a general guide.

As for the school system, the issue is fairly straightforward. Given what we have already said about the role that the Duce assigned to the younger generations in the context of creating "Fascist civilization," there is no need to dwell on the decisive importance that the fascistization of the school system held for Mussolini.

As early as the end of 1925, in his opening address to the national congress of the Fascist School Corporation, Mussolini had been explicit:

The government demands that the school system be inspired by the ideals of Fascism; it demands that the school system not be—I do not say hostile—but not even indifferent to Fascism or agnostic toward it; it demands that the entire school system, at all levels and in all its components, educate Italian youth to understand Fascism, to renew themselves through Fascism, and to live within the historical climate created by the Fascist revolution… The Italian school system must reflect the Italian character. The Italian school system must present the antithesis of all the flaws in the Italian character: simplism, superficiality, and the belief that everything will turn out all right.

In accordance with these directives, the program to fascistize the school system proceeded in rapid stages, even though this very often led to a betrayal of the spirit of the Gentile reform, which was subjected to a whole series of "tweaks" that almost completely disfigured it, provoking protests and progressive discouragement—and in some cases, a turning away from fascism— among numerous educators who had initially been drawn to it because they were convinced that it could finally renew the school system and raise its standards.

Mussolini, who had once called the reform “truly revolutionary,” initially (until around 1929) had defended it to some extent—both as a matter of principle and because he was prodded by Gentile, who never missed an opportunity to remind him of the regime’s need to form a new ruling class that was morally and culturally worthy of national traditions and the role Italy was meant to play in Europe—and, finally, because he realized that the spirit driving many critics of the reform had very little that was actually fascist; Later, however, faced with the difficulties the reform posed for a rapid and comprehensive fascistization of the school system (especially middle and high schools), he came to regard it as “a mistake due to the times and the mindset of the minister at the time,” and sided with those who wanted to revise it.

The results, however, had not lived up to expectations, especially with regard to middle school and the university; so much so that the Grand Council, at the end of 1927, had to acknowledge that while the results were excellent for elementary school (where the caliber of teachers was lower, fascism was more prevalent, and the school authorities and the PNF had more effective means of enforcing their directives), they were, by contrast, only “satisfactory” for middle school and universities; and that, while a start had been made on the fascistization of the school system, much still remained to be done.

As usual, the real problem turned out to be “in the details”; for an effective fascistization of the school system, there was a lack (especially as one moved up to the higher grades) of the right people to truly fascistize it: even among fascist teachers, relatively few were willing to take their support for the regime so far as to accept that the school would lose its true function, becoming a school of conformity rather than critical thinking, of political commentary rather than culture.

That this was the real problem, moreover, is also evident from the Fascist press of the time, in which one of the recurring themes is, precisely, the lack of truly Fascist teachers and the need to train them.

A typical example, to cite just one, is what *Critica fascista* wrote in 1927:

To try to remedy this situation and thus accelerate the process of fascistization in 1926–28, the regime had taken a whole series of measures regarding teachers, including the requirement that elementary school teachers take an oath and the authorization to dismiss from service those who “due to demonstrations inside or outside the school, failed to provide assurances that they would fulfill their duty or ‘placed themselves in a position incompatible with the government’s general political directives.’”

In 1928, it was also decided to prepare and introduce the “single state textbook” for elementary schools beginning with the 1930–31 school year. The most important measure, however, had been the establishment of the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) in 1926–27.

The purpose of the ONB was to provide care, physical education, and moral education “in accordance with the principles and ideals embraced by Fascism” for young people between the ages of eight and eighteen. In theory, participation in the ONB was voluntary; in practice—since, in the regime’s view, it

was intended to instill in young people a “collective sense of life” and to achieve that “fascistization” of youth where the school system had proven inadequate—the Ministry of Public Education’s first priority was to urge school superintendents and educational authorities to work toward close collaboration between schools and the ONB and to ensure that, especially in elementary school, all boys and girls enrolled in it; To this end, it was also decreed that places, scholarships, awards, grants, etc., would be granted preferentially to ONB members.

As a result, the number of members, which stood at approximately 800,000 at the end of 1927, had already risen to more than 1,230,000 by 1929. However, the ONB experienced its greatest growth in the first half of the 1930s (in 1934, its membership exceeded 3,650,000, to which must be added the members of the Fascist Youth Groups, which organized young people aged eighteen to twenty-one, and the Fascist University Groups, totaling just under another 600,000 members, out of a school-age population—including children aged six to seven—of approximately 5,300,000), when Mussolini, having transformed the Ministry of Public Instruction into the Ministry of National Education to underscore the break that the new “cycle of government”— that had begun in September 1929 was to mark a break, even in the realm of education, he decided to pursue, in tandem with the fight against illiteracy, the increase in school enrollment, and the strengthening of schools at all levels, the further fascistization of the school system itself. To implement this second part of his program, he focused above all on strengthening the Fascist youth organizations and on their ever-greater integration into school life.

During these years, the regime’s watchword regarding education became Mussolini’s slogan “book and musket.”

Physical education, military training, and participation in the regime’s events and demonstrations became, in practice, an integral part of school life, which saw its traditional and fundamental purpose—that of instruction—forced to give way largely to that of so-called “education,” indoctrination, and the political training of young people.

Once again, however, the actual results for the regime were, on closer inspection, less positive than they appeared at first glance. In practice, schools ended up being administered under a sort of de facto partnership between teachers and the ONB, which, on the one hand, certainly did not benefit the students’ academic seriousness and commitment, on the other hand, it did allow the most serious and dedicated teachers the opportunity to continue their teaching (aside from a few obvious concessions—sometimes not even perceived as such—to the prevailing Mussolini-style triumphalism, which, given the general atmosphere, of little significance) according to their conscience and traditional methods; and, on yet another hand, it effectively prevented the political-activist agenda from prevailing over the cultural one and, ultimately, thus rendered the fascist indoctrination of youth—at least its best segment—superficial, especially as they progressed toward higher levels of education.

This explains why the fascistization of the school system continued in practice to be discussed as an unresolved issue (and some of the more courageous even spoke of a crisis in the school system) and why Mussolini, when in January 1935 he decided to undertake a further massive effort to resolve it, aimed to eradicate the problem at its roots: on the one hand, he concentrated his efforts primarily on an effective “reformation” of higher education (that is, higher education, which was more directly responsible for training new teachers and, in general, the new ruling class); and, on the other hand—after having tried, over ten years of the regime, four ministers all drawn from the world of higher education and the ranks of his supporters—he chose to implement it through an old-school fascist like C. M. De Vecchi, who—aside from a few superficial gestures—had very little in common with

education and culture, but who had all the makings to impose the harsh, military-style discipline of a "true" fascist, and who for some time had made no secret of his conviction that while "the regime's disciplinary measures" had "perhaps prevailed over primary and secondary schools," the same could not be said for "the realm of high culture," so that "the time had come to implement the appropriate measures so that," even in this sector of education, "the goal might be achieved in substance and style."

The largely positive results achieved by the policy of fascistization of middle school and, above all, elementary school certainly help explain how, in the 1930s—as the new generation educated under the regime grew up and entered the workforce—fascism managed to gain a foothold and significantly expand its support among the working classes, among farmers, and especially among workers.

However, the phenomenon is of such significance that this explanation, on its own, is insufficient, just as it is insufficient to supplement it with a generic reference to the climate of general demobilization and social reintegration that had already been developing for several years in parallel with the regime's entrenchment in the country.

To obtain a realistic picture of the situation, these explanations must be supplemented by others, which are to be found in the success—not definitive, but certainly undeniable for nearly a decade—achieved by the regime's efforts to bring the working masses under its control through certain ad hoc instruments, such as the labor unions and, even more so, the numerous social organizations created or strengthened by the regime itself with a dual perspective: one that was at the same time sincerely social (and in this sense, even though presented as the regime's achievements, these were in reality measures and institutions that were developing more or less rapidly in other countries as well and were, essentially, a product of the new era) and instrumentally political (that is, they responded to the regime's need to organize consensus around itself and to extend its control as far as possible over all aspects of the social life of workers and citizens in general).

To underestimate—as has often been the case—this success and, with it, the instruments through which it was achieved is, for a historical understanding of the reality of the regime, a very serious error.

A typical example of this underestimation is the judgment generally passed on the fascist trade unions.

According to this view, the trade unions during the regime served virtually no other purpose than to organize and control workers, to prevent any manifestation of class self-defense, and to lend credence —through their presence and their acquiescence to government decisions (and even to employers' demands)—to a fictitious support of the regime by the workers themselves.

In reality, there is no doubt that, for the regime, the unions were one of the tools for organizing consensus, and that there were certainly union leaders who subordinated everything to the need for a "collaboration of efforts" to increase production and made every issue of income redistribution contingent on this need—to the point of speaking, in the case of the labor unions, in general terms about defending the "fundamental rights" of workers, but for the employers' unions, far more significantly, of "containing the opposing movement within the limits set by their own right as producers and technical managers of the economic enterprise"; it is equally certain, however, that while for several years the unions performed the function the regime had assigned to them, this was due above all to the fact that—within the limits permitted by the reality in which they operated—they fulfilled a positive function for the workers, for better or worse, and most of their leaders (especially

those of the older generation, who had come to Fascism from pre-existing labor organizations, whereas those of the younger generation—generally of bourgeois background and trained practically during the regime—were more attached to a bureaucratic conception of the union) repeatedly sought to contain the demands of the opposing side, to repel the attacks on the labor movement coming from more conservative circles (economic, political, or bureaucratic—it matters little), and to exploit the role that the regime had de facto assigned to the unions to give them a more prominent role and place in the life of the regime.

To limit ourselves to the period of interest here, there is no doubt that if, in the first half of the 1930s, Fascism succeeded in gaining a foothold among workers—and factory workers in particular (and not only among the traditionally more corporatist categories)—and in finding growing support among them, this was largely due precisely to the gradual revival the unions experienced from the spring of 1930 onward, and to the fact that—in the wake of this revival—their leadership was able, on the one hand, to counter the employers' offensive to some extent and thus regain credibility among the rank and file, and, on the other hand—by exploiting, instead, Mussolini's need to frame the regime in "popular" terms and thereby rally the country around it (also, as we have seen, to more easily persuade the business community to accept his policy of economic intervention)—it was able to repel the attempts of those who would have liked to take advantage of the introduction of the first corporatist measures to further strip the unions of all power and any remaining autonomy.

Nor do we believe one should underestimate the fact that, precisely toward the end of this period, some voices rose from the ranks of the Fascist trade unionists calling for the unions to be given greater space within the regime and even a driving role in its future evolution (a typical example is that of Luigi Fontanelli): voices that—it is true—generally failed to have a real impact on the actual situation, but which helped to foster and give expression to an atmosphere of anticipation and participation (which did not escape the attention of that segment of the anti-fascist movement that was following the evolution of the Italian situation most closely)—an atmosphere that certainly benefited the regime greatly at that time in terms of public support, but which also benefited the workers, at least in the sense that it helped persuade Mussolini to take their expectations and demands into account more than in the past, at least in the economic sphere.

An even greater (and, as usual, often underestimated) contribution to the integration into the regime and the fascistization of the working masses was made by the numerous institutions active in the fields of social assistance, social security, and the organization of leisure time, which were directly or indirectly dependent on the state, the National Fascist Party (PNF), and the trade unions.

Thanks to these institutions, in fact, the regime succeeded during this period in compensating workers for at least part of the wage cuts they had suffered through a series of social services and in offering them a considerable number of recreational, athletic, cultural, and health-related opportunities—both individual and collective—that had been unknown or virtually unknown in Italy until then and that greatly influenced their attitude toward Fascism, especially that of the young and very young who benefited most from them.

Consider, to give one of the best-known examples, the large number of boys and girls who were able to take advantage of the vast network of summer camps and camping programs—especially during the summer—established by the regime and gradually expanded year after year (summer camp attendance rose from about 150,000 in 1930 to over 475,000 in 1934).

Among these institutions, the most politically significant was undoubtedly the National After-Work

Organization (OND), founded in 1925 and rapidly expanded until it became the regime's most important mass organization.

In 1926, the OND had just over 280,000 members; within a decade, however, this number had grown to 2,780,000, divided among just under 20,000 local chapters, and by the eve of World War II, the membership had reached approximately 5 million across 24,500 state, corporate, rural, municipal, and neighborhood chapters.

Through the Dopolavoro, workers (in 1926, white-collar workers accounted for 57% of members and blue-collar workers for 43%; by 1932, the ratio had already reversed: manual laborers accounted for 67% and white-collar workers for 33%) enjoyed, in addition to certain forms of social assistance supplementing standard benefits, the opportunity to take advantage of various perks and discounts and, above all, a rich array of sports, recreational, tourist, artistic, and cultural activities: by the end of its first decade of operation, the OND included, among other things, 1,227 theaters, 771 movie theaters, 2,066 amateur theater groups, 2,130 orchestras, 3,787 marching bands, 994 choral schools, 10,302 professional and cultural associations, 6,427 libraries, 11,159 "after-work" sports clubs (with over 1,400,000 participants), and 4,704 competitive sports clubs (with over 243,000 participants).

Through this vast and widespread organizational network (with which any comparison to pre-fascist organizations is practically impossible and which had no parallel in any other capitalist country) the Dopolavoro was the most distinctive and important mass institution at the regime's disposal for drawing workers—and particularly the youngest among them—closer and binding them to itself, by satisfying some of their economic and, above all, social needs and giving them the feeling of enjoying a new status and a new level of respect.

This clearly explains the regime's commitment to strengthening the OND (despite the economic difficulties of the time) and promoting it as one of its greatest achievements.

To complete this brief overview of the main instruments on which the regime based its policy of fascistization, only one element is missing at this point—the most important one and, at the same time, the one that, on closer inspection, failed more than any other in the task assigned to it: the Fascist Party.

If it is permissible to draw a distinction between consensus and fascistization—or, if one prefers, between more or less passive fascistization (turning Italians into "good citizens," loyal to the government, who did not oppose the regime's policies, essentially accepted its underlying motivations and prospects, and aligned their behavior and daily activities with them, without taking their possible criticisms and reservations so far as to consider the possibility of a change in the regime, but who, at the same time, did not actively participate in political life or, if they did, limited their participation to its most superficial manifestations or those that allowed them to enjoy certain benefits and avoid being disadvantaged in their activities compared to other, more zealous citizens) and active fascistization (that is, the formation of true fascists, active as such in the life of the country at all levels of their daily activities and integrated into the regime's structures as driving forces), it is evident that the instruments we have discussed so far could correspond almost exclusively to the first type of fascistization; they could do very little, however, in the second sense, except to prepare, so to speak, the ground for the subsequent action of other instruments—namely, the party itself; only the PNF, in fact, could take on the task of fully politicizing Italians—and first and foremost the youth—the future ruling class necessary for a complete and definitive fascistization of the country.

Hence the great importance, for the purposes of our discussion, of the role assigned to the PNF within

the regime's political framework and of how it was able to fulfill that role.

Between the fall of 1929 and the end of 1934—the period we are examining—three general secretaries succeeded one another at the helm of the PNF: Augusto Turati until October 7, 1930; Giovanni Giuriati until December 7, 1931; and Achille Starace from that date onward.

The presence of these three men at the helm of the PNF corresponded to three distinct phases in the history of the party and the regime.

As we have seen, in 1926 Mussolini had found in Turati not only the man best suited to lead the party and support his work in organizing the regime, but also the best secretary the PNF had in its entire existence spanning more than twenty years. With the Conciliation and the "plebiscite," however, Turati's tenure had practically come to an end.

For three years, politically speaking, he had been the Duce's closest collaborator; together with Bocchini (whom, incidentally, Turati apparently had closely monitored), he was the most effective interpreter of Mussolini's policies: he had "brought the party into line" and integrated it into the regime as Mussolini intended, with firmness but also with discretion; both at the top and on the periphery, he had essentially eliminated the danger of a dualism between the state and the party at its very roots, and the PNF was now merely an instrument of the regime, within which the old fascists and former supporters had begun to merge; and if any factions still existed, they now took the form of pressure and opinion groups rather than organized entities capable of attempting to influence fundamental political decisions.

Turati, as we have seen, had not, however, been a merely passive interpreter or implementer of Mussolini's policies; while fully in agreement with the Duce on the fundamental principles, he disagreed with or had reservations about various specific aspects of them and, above all, was driven by a moralism that Mussolini—in his tactical approach and his distrust of people—considered abstract and, at worst, dangerous. In this situation, it was therefore inevitable that, once the main political and organizational problems on which the two were in full agreement had been resolved or were on the path to resolution, the points of divergence would gradually come to dominate their relationship; reasons that were both real and deliberately stoked by those Fascist leaders who, rightly or wrongly, considered themselves victims of Turati's political leadership and were just waiting for an opportunity to exact revenge, or aspired to supplant him and his entourage at the party's helm, or feared that Turati might become too powerful in his position as "vice duce," thereby making his succession inevitable in the event of Mussolini's untimely death.

Given these circumstances, on March 19, 1929, Turati had offered his resignation to Mussolini:

Duce! April 7 marks three years since my appointment as secretary. You know the results of my modest work: I believe I have served faithfully and conscientiously. Whatever your command may be, you know that I will respond as I did three years ago: "Very well!" Therefore, let me also tell you what is in my heart.

I believe it is best that I return to the ranks. It is necessary, Duce, that someone set this example: to

leave without asking for any other position or pension; to leave by standing at attention! and thanking you for allowing me to serve and for giving me more than I deserved based on my qualifications.

At that moment, however, Mussolini could not remove Turati from the party secretariat; aside from the difficulty of replacing him with an equally authoritative figure, at least three reasons stood in the way of his removal from the party secretariat:

a) the restructuring of the PNF initiated by Turati in previous years had not yet been completed in its essential elements (the new charter had not yet been approved, and the composition of the Grand Council had not yet been revised);

b) since the party secretary was not an intransigent figure regarding relations between the state and the Church, his replacement at that time could have taken on a significance that Mussolini wished to avoid, so as not to dramatize the situation or run the risk of reigniting the controversy with the Holy See that had followed the Conciliation;

c) similarly, at that time, the removal of Turati—who had always proven himself a staunch defender of the party—could have been interpreted as a first concrete step toward the party's dissolution and could have emboldened those leaning in that direction.

Mussolini had therefore rejected the resignation, and on September 14, during the "grand report on Fascism"—in which he had outlined the programmatic guidelines for the new "cycle of government"—he read the letter aloud and delivered a veritable eulogy of Turati and his work as secretary of the PNF; For no other living party leader had Mussolini ever uttered—nor would he ever utter—such unconditional and absolute words of praise.

Nevertheless, the points of disagreement between the two politicians not only persisted but gradually increased and intensified.

When it came to taking charge of the party and "bringing it into line," Turati had shown neither hesitation nor weakness; he had acted with the utmost intransigence, fully convinced that what mattered was the "quality" and not the "quantity" of members, that the PNF had to be thoroughly reshaped if it was to be made compatible with the kind of society Mussolini aimed to create, and that the authority of the state must always prevail over that of the party.

For Turati, however, this was not to result in a hollowing out of the party itself, nor in a reduction of its importance and functions: the PNF was to be entrusted with extremely important executive and ideological tasks, ranging from the constitutional duties enshrined in the 1928 law on the organization and powers of the Grand Council, to those related to the political control of all mass organizations (including trade unions), to those connected with the formation of the new ruling class.

From this perspective, Turati believed it was necessary that the PNF, after being "brought into line," be revitalized (it is highly significant that in 1929, in preparation for the cabinet reshuffle intended to launch the "new cycle" of Mussolini's politics, Turati attempted to combine the two positions of PNF secretary and undersecretary of the Interior in the same person, with the Duce remaining minister of

that department) and, in particular, that, on the one hand, the party not lose contact with the most authentic wing of Fascism and that this wing merge with the former supporters but not be sacrificed to them or, indeed, practically drowned out by them (hence his decision in 1928 to close membership—with possible exceptions only for non-Italians in the province of Bolzano who had performed military service and for officers leaving active duty—and to proceed with new recruitment only through the annual "Fascist conscription drives" for young people) and, on the other hand, that the party impose on its members not only iron discipline, but also behavior and a "lifestyle"

"truly fascist" lifestyle.

On this approach to the party issue, however, Mussolini agreed with Turati more in theory than in practice, both because, deep down, he was always wary of the party and feared that, under Turati's vision, it might become too revitalized and thus create difficulties for him once again, and because—as we have said—he considered certain concerns of the PNF secretary to be moralistic and politically unrealistic.

On two issues in particular, Mussolini had never agreed with Turati.

With regard to the old fascist movement—which Turati, too, had purged and reined in without hesitation—he would have preferred even more drastic action than that taken by the PNF secretary, without too much concern for the consequences this would have had on the party's internal balance and character.

And, in particular, he would have liked Turati to have taken a more uncompromising stance toward Farinacci and not to have consistently refused to consider the idea of expelling him from the party.

This source of conflict had remained latent during the early years of Turati's secretariat; but once the Farinacci-Belloni dispute erupted in 1930 and rumors began to circulate that Arnaldo Mussolini was involved in some of the operations that the former secretary of the PNF was contesting against the former podestà of Milan, Turati's continued refusal to take drastic measures against Farinacci—and, indeed, his tendency to emphasize his "impartial" stance toward the protagonists of the dispute, aroused in Mussolini a genuine resentment toward Turati, which undoubtedly contributed to his decision to oust him from the leadership of the PNF, especially when it became clear that Farinacci would emerge victorious from the dispute and politically strengthened.

Another source of conflict stemmed from the differing views held by Mussolini and Turati on how "moral" cases—and, more generally, the scandals plaguing the regime in which fascists were involved—should be addressed and resolved.

In words, Mussolini advocated absolute moral intransigence.

As he told the Milanese party leaders on July 10, 1929, the party had to "demand the utmost integrity from those who hold political and administrative offices."

Fascism is a glass house, into which everyone must and can look.

Woe to those who exploit their party membership and wear the black shirt to close deals they otherwise would not be able to pull off.

In reality, however, he applied this rule only to the “small fry,” when the exposure of some minor case could not cause a scandal; indeed, he believed that punishing the guilty might benefit the regime and give the impression that it was always ready to intervene and punish those who failed in their duty.

He adopted an entirely different attitude, however, in more serious cases involving prominent figures that could cause a scandal. Faced with such cases, his moralizing intentions almost always gave way to the fear of compromising the—entirely contrived—picture that propaganda painted every day of a Fascist Italy completely different from pre-Fascist Italy and democratic countries—an Italy in which everything proceeded in the best possible way, corruption had been eradicated, every position, whether minor or major, was held by competent, confident, and incorruptible men—men who, thanks to fascism, thought only of the good of the state and its citizens, led a virtuous and exemplary life devoted entirely to work and family, and were meant to serve as role models for everyone.

Thus, in the vast majority of cases, subjectively speaking, he ended up attributing every incident to human frailty and reaffirmed his conviction that there was little or nothing to be done with such human material; in practice—after opening a file on the individual in question so that it might one day be used discreetly—he swept everything under the rug, often without taking action against those responsible.

A typical example in this regard is an episode recounted in his memoirs by Antonio Mosconi on a page dedicated to his departure from the Ministry of Finance:

I left the government largely as a result of a serious disagreement with Mussolini. In consultation with him, I had ordered two investigations, which reached conclusions unfavorable to individuals holding important positions—whom I need not name here.

He promised me he would replace them; but, since he did not do so, I resigned. I recall a lively conversation from that time—I believe it was in the second half of 1931—in which, after he had remarked to me that a scandal must be avoided, I replied by quoting the Church’s saying *oportet ut eveniant scandala*; otherwise, if wrongdoing were encouraged, the country would one day become nothing but a scandal, and he would be held responsible!

Despite this, he replied that he would accept my resignation only after the second Treasury Bond loan —which was already underway—had been fully completed, a task I had been required to see through to the end.

This approach to addressing and resolving “moral issues” was not shared by Turati. The party secretary was convinced that such issues should be prevented through a more rigorous moral screening of party officials and more diligent oversight of them, and that—should they occur—severe measures should be taken without shying away from intervention out of fear of scandal; furthermore, Turati was highly

skeptical about the concrete results—both on the moral level and, more generally, on the political level—that would ultimately accrue to the regime from such an approach to the problem, as well as from effectively encouraging the spread of a double standard—puritanical and sanctimonious in form, but lax and corrupt in substance, even when it did not translate into actual derelictions of duty or abuses in the performance of public duties.

This led to a series of investigations he discreetly ordered into various party leaders and even a sitting minister, whose actions had intensified the already widespread hostility directed at him and had annoyed Mussolini, who was always fearful that new scandals might arise from them.

In addition to these two reasons for disagreement in 1930, at least two others arose which—combined with the previous ones and the covert campaign waged with Mussolini by the opponents of the PNF secretary, who accused him of seeking to increase his own popularity and personal power in order to make himself indispensable and thus be able to succeed the Duce—led to Turati's replacement at the party's helm. The first concerned the policy implemented to address the initial repercussions of the Great Depression.

According to Turati, there was only one possible political course of action in the face of the crisis: drastically reduce spending and implement controlled reflation, allocating available capital not to public works and unemployment relief but to directly aid industry and agriculture.

It is clear that the Duce would never have gone down this path (it seems Turati even went so far as to speak out in the Grand Council in favor of abandoning the "ninety percent quota"); indeed, one day, after discussing the matter with Turati, he abruptly ended the conversation by stating irritably: "That means tomorrow morning I'll send the unemployed to your house!") and that the collaboration between the two was bound to fall apart sooner or later.

The second point of disagreement, however, concerned policy toward the unions.

For Turati, in fact, under no circumstances should the party have loosened its control over the unions, and nothing was more dangerous than restoring to them even a fraction of the autonomy and power that had been taken from them with the dissolution of the Rossoni confederation; and this was not because he was hostile to the regime's efforts to empower the unions, but because, on the one hand, he was convinced that they were still too steeped in a class-based mentality, and on the other hand, because he feared that, by loosening control over the unions, one would inevitably end up abandoning any intention to "bring employers into line," employers, thereby running counter to the very logic of the fascist state—which, on the contrary, was to eliminate all dualisms and concentrate all authority within the state—and, furthermore, because he was deeply concerned about the bureaucratic bloat that was increasingly characterizing the trade union organization and threatened to cause corporatism to found in a sort of corporocracy.

But at that moment, Mussolini—as we have seen—if he had any concern at all, it was to try to win over the working masses and to avert the threat—from his most immediate and concrete perspective—that the crisis might negatively affect workers' attitudes toward the regime; in this situation, he was moving in precisely the opposite direction from Turati's concerns, toward a reevaluation of the unions and granting them greater scope for action, and he was, perhaps, even willing to tolerate a limited, controlled, and temporary resurgence of class struggle if this could later serve as a bargaining chip with the economic and industrial sectors to secure a less hostile attitude toward his public spending policy.

With events unfolding in this way, it is clear that the collaboration between Mussolini and Turati was now on its last legs. It is therefore understandable why, fully aware of the precariousness of the situation, on September 14, 1930, the secretary of the PNF—anticipating a concerted attack that his opponents were about to launch against him before the Duce and which he would not have the strength to repel—preferred to tender his resignation once again, certain that this time Mussolini would not reject it, and, indeed, would be grateful to him for having allowed him to rid himself of Turati in the best possible way.

It is highly significant in this regard that Mussolini, even though Turati had immediately informed him of his intention to "leave political life for good" and devote himself "to professional and private activities," appointed him a member of the Grand Council at the very moment he accepted his resignation (along with Ciano, De Stefani, and—evidently to underscore his new stance toward the unions—Rossoni); in the months that followed—until the summer of '32, when the rancor of his implacable adversaries succeeded in eliminating him once and for all through a veritable moral lynching—he maintained, despite some temporary differences of opinion, essentially good relations, to the point of tolerating his constant letters and memos (generally quite critical, especially toward his successor as secretary of the PNF) on the general political situation and specific local issues, written with the mindset of a party secretary—one who was, moreover, embittered by seeing his own political line "betrayed"; he allowed him to be appointed editor-in-chief of a major daily newspaper such as Turin's *La Stampa*; and, finally, when Starace (who had been one of Turati's most tenacious opponents) was removed from the PNF secretariat, he raised no objections to his rehabilitation and readmission to the party (from which he had been expelled following the "scandal" of '32) by Ettore Muti.

Mussolini appointed Giovanni Giuriati to replace Turati as secretary of the PNF.

At first glance, this choice is not easily understood and deserves closer examination.

At that time, Giuriati was Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies; he had served in the coalition government formed by Mussolini after the "March on Rome" as Minister of the Liberated Territories and had headed the Ministry of Public Works between 1925 and 1929; nevertheless, he could not truly be considered a leading figure in Fascism. An irredentist (he had also served as president of the Trento and Trieste region), a valiant fighter, and D'Annunzio's chief of staff in Fiume during the early period of the occupation, he had only joined the Fascist movement in 1921 and had played no part in the squadrismo; indeed, he had been one of the negotiators of the "Pact of Pacification"; in a certain sense, he could be described as a nationalist who had joined the Fascist movement two years before the merger.

Personally honest, he was a sincere Fascist, averse to adopting extremist attitudes, and essentially outside the various Fascist factions and cliques, which generally viewed him as an outsider from the outset—someone whose "tenure" would be brief and who should not be taken too seriously.

A prominent figure of the regime, therefore, rather than a true party representative.

Finally, he was a man in whom Mussolini ultimately could not have had complete trust if—as Giuriati himself wrote in his memoirs—he felt the need to impose on him two collaborators whom Giuriati "did not want."

Given Giuriati's character, his selection seems to us to have only one possible explanation. After two

figures—so different from one another yet undoubtedly notable and drawn from the ranks of old-guard Fascism—such as Farinacci and Turati, Mussolini—now firmly resolved to make the PNF an instrument 100% subservient to his will, with purely technical and ceremonial duties and no political autonomy—could not, at that moment, entrust the party to anyone other than a man like Giuriati.

A choice like that of Starace—which he would make fourteen months later and had likely already decided upon—would have represented too abrupt a shift, one that would inevitably have provoked comparisons that were far too unfavorable when compared to his predecessors; not to mention that, at that moment, such a choice would have stirred up too much discontent, both within the still-powerful Turati faction (which viewed Starace as one of the main architects of the covert struggle against their leader) and among the other contenders for the party secretariat.

Better, then, to choose a transitional figure—one with some, but not excessive, prestige, without a past to which to cling, outside the factions and cliques, and, at the same time, known for his moderate political positions, but also for a certain military bearing—and who, precisely because of his detachment from both the mentality of old-style fascism centered on the squads and the various power groups within the party, would be able to finally complete the "reorganization" of the PNF according to Mussolini's will.

Hence the choice of Giuriati, "a man of few words and many deeds, an organizer and tireless worker"; hence the task that Mussolini publicly assigned to Giuriati on October 27, 1930, on the eve of the new "Fascist Year" and in anticipation of the regime's "tenth anniversary":

While the working people view Fascism with growing sympathy, the die-hards are the dregs of the so-called liberal bourgeoisie.

Some of them have managed in recent years to infiltrate the party or the regime's local branches, especially in the outskirts. Comrade Giuriati, you are tasked with rooting them out! They are dead weight that slows our march. They are people who may betray us and who, deep down, already do. It is better to have them as enemies than as allies. They are not a danger today, but they are certainly a nuisance, and in certain cases they can become a threat.

Fascism is an army on the march; it must therefore be safeguarded with the most basic security measures… Comrade Giuriati, you must further strengthen the party's moral and material strength. The purge must continue. In this regard, leniency must always be granted to the Blackshirts of yesteryear—to the comrades who are still ready to risk their lives for fascism—not to the "heroes of the sixth day," who came to fascism only after the storm had passed, and who would be quick to cut and run if those times were to return!… Given the scope and increasing intensity of the struggle between fascism and anti-fascism, anything that might weigh down or weaken the party must be eliminated.

This is no longer the time for trivial matters: local issues must not absorb more time and energy than is strictly necessary. Anyone who does not understand or refuse to comply with this non-negotiable requirement automatically places themselves outside the mindset and ranks of fascism.

During Turati's tenure as secretary, the purge and "reorganization" of the PNF had been aimed

primarily at the old, intransigent, parochial form of Fascism—which was, in its own way, democratic (as far as the party's internal life was concerned)— that is, the faction that at that time most concerned Mussolini due to its indiscipline and belligerence, as well as its ambitions to present itself as the true fascism—the one tasked with carrying forward the "fascist revolution" and seizing all power until it became the State itself.

Thanks to Turati, this faction of Fascism had been forced in previous years—by fair means or foul—to submit to the state and either "fall in line" with the party or leave it.

Turati, however, had paid less attention—at least selectively—to moderate fascism, to the fascism of former sympathizers, and, in general, to those who had joined the PNF in the very final phase of the struggle for power and especially after the "March on Rome" and the consolidation of power; except in specific and glaring cases, he had in fact preferred, on the one hand, to avoid having to face a dual form of hostility (with the risk that they might unite against him) and, on the other hand, not to deprive the party of a range of technical expertise and key figures in the country's civic life—figures who would have been very difficult to adequately replace at that time and whom it was not advisable to lose.

It now fell to Giuriati to proceed further along this path and definitively complete the internal restructuring of the PNF and its integration into the regime as Mussolini intended (that is, subordinated in every respect to the state, with no further aspirations for autonomy or political initiative of any kind), so as to make it the instrument through which to train and select the regime's future cadres.

In particular, Giuriati was tasked with:

- to complete the purge of certain groups of the old intransigent faction that had not yet been subdued, primarily the Farinacci faction;

- to extend the purge to certain sectors of the most recent members, who had flocked to Fascism for opportunistic reasons and to preserve old positions of power, whose presence in the party had by then become counterproductive—both in terms of public opinion and because it gave the old Fascists, and Farinacci in particular, an opening to pose as victims of the old cliques and, above all, as moralizers, with their criticisms of Fascism; and, finally, because it was very often precisely among these sectors of former supporters that the unfolding economic crisis was causing the greatest distress and discontent regarding Mussolini's economic policy and certain of his more recent policy directions;

- to strengthen the PNF in the sectors that Turati had neglected—young people, university students, women, and the organizations and institutions under its purview;

- to make the PNF capable of serving as the moral, organizational, and propaganda tool needed to create in the country that "harsh climate" which, according to Mussolini, was necessary to unite all Italians behind the regime and to break through, isolate, silence, undermine, and discredit the "cowards," the "slackers," the "profiteers," the "disillusioned"—in short, all those who, more or less openly, criticized the regime's policies.

The results Giuriati achieved in just over a year in these four areas were certainly not insignificant; on the whole, however, they must not have fully satisfied Mussolini and led to several clashes between the two (following one of these, in early June 1931, Giuriati even asked to be relieved of his duties, but Mussolini refused to replace him), which likely contributed to making Giuriati's "tenure" so brief.

The new secretary tackled the purge of the PNF with energy and determination that were in no way inferior to those displayed by Turati.

According to Giuriati's own memoirs, 120,000 members were expelled; to obtain a complete picture of the operation, however, one would need to add to the number of those expelled the number of those who—even on this occasion—voluntarily did not request renewal of their membership cards, thereby avoiding expulsion, as well as the number of those who were suspended from the party for varying lengths of time; regarding the former, however, we lack any data; as for the latter, the only information at our disposal consists of the provisional figures released by Giuriati in a speech delivered in Milan on April 20, 1931: according to the PNF secretary, as of that date, 56,738 members had been expelled and 34,022 suspended; In the absence of comprehensive data, the only somewhat indicative figure can be derived from a comparison between the number of members on the eve of Turati's removal and that at the time of Giuriati's replacement by Starace.

This comparison shows that while during Giuriati's tenure the number of members in the Women's Fasci, the Young Fascists, and the Fascist University Groups had increased, the number of members in the actual Fasci—the men's organizations, which were the sole targets of the purge—decreased by nearly 215,000, far exceeding, therefore, than the number Giuriati claims were expelled, especially when considering the annual intake of new members from the Fascist draft at that time.

In addition to the purge itself, Giuriati also undertook a systematic review of many individual cases, focusing in particular on the issue of seniority.

After the "March on Rome," many new members had been granted backdated seniority based on actual —but often also presumed—previous fascist "merits." This procedure had sparked much criticism and protest.

Hence the new secretary's decision to reexamine individual cases and correct those that were clearly the result of favoritism or excessive leniency. However, even in this regard, we lack comprehensive data to assess the results of this action with any degree of precision; the only figure available is only partially indicative and was reported by Giuriati in his aforementioned speech in Milan on April 20: as of that date, 23,334 seniority records had been corrected.

This set of measures—which primarily affected the most recent members—was generally well received. Particularly favorable opinions were expressed by the old guard of Fascism, which for years had been calling for a review of party membership and which—having been, under Turati, the group that had borne the brunt of Mussolini's policy of "reorganizing" the party—saw in these measures a recognition of the validity of its own complaints and demands and, perhaps, initially deluded itself into believing that the action would be even more extensive and would result in an increase in its own political clout.

Among the many statements that could be cited in this regard, we will mention just two, by way of example: the editorial "On Action Within the Party," written by Cornelio Di Marzio, published in the *Corriere Padano* on November 1, 1930 (the day after Mussolini's speech in which he outlined the tasks assigned to Giuriati) and the commentary—also in the form of an editorial ("Let's Get Back on Track")—in which *Il regime fascista* took a stand on April 21, 1931, in favor of Giuriati's speech from the previous day.

These favorable assessments of Giuriati's purge and moralizing campaign and, more generally, of the

strengthening of the party-affiliated organizations and the women's and youth groups he had achieved should not, however, lead one to believe that the new secretary of the PNF succeeded in reabsorbing the latent—albeit no longer dangerous—discontent of a large portion of the old fascists, and in particular of the Farinaccians.

For them, in fact, the subordinate role to which the party had been confined by Mussolini and Turati remained the fundamental problem, and in the face of which the measures adopted by Giuriati were nothing more than palliative measures aimed at remedying a particular and more glaring aspect of the situation—measures that would ultimately serve no real purpose, given that in all other respects the new party secretary remained faithful to Mussolini's line and (even though, out of hatred for Turati, they refused to acknowledge it) followed it even more slavishly than his predecessor.

Hence, generally speaking, their continued more or less explicit criticism of Mussolini and their resorting—even against Giuriati—to underhanded smear campaigns and a clandestine struggle, against which the PNF secretary soon proved to be practically powerless, given that Mussolini, on the one hand, would have wanted him to take decisive action against Farinacci and expel him from the party (which Giuriati refused to do on no fewer than three occasions, being convinced that "Farinacci, in essence, was right, and because I would have provoked a crisis within the party whose consequences would have been very difficult to predict"), on the other hand, refused to give his consent to systematic measures against the malcontents and dissidents of the old Fascist guard—who were by then politically defeated and, due to their internal conflicts and mutual jealousies, incapable of any effective action beyond mere opposition; thus, for Mussolini, the most "political" stance was to let "the pot simmer," since the drawbacks that might result were neutralized and offset by the advantages of the mutual checks and balances that the dissidents and rebels exerted on one another, thereby condemning themselves to inaction and sparing the Duce the scandal of having to publicly acknowledge that there was no longer any agreement between him and a portion of his old comrades-in-arms.

This attitude on Mussolini's part also helps explain why, after instructing the secretary of the PNF to purge the party of its "dead weight," the Duce then quickly backtracked. A clear sign of this was the critical stance soon adopted by *Popolo d'Italia* toward those who applauded Giuriati's purge proposals too enthusiastically and demanded that the party secretary's "scalpel" cut ever deeper.

In light of this attitude, it is understandable why Mussolini, shortly thereafter confronted with the scope of the measures taken, considered them excessive (according to Giuriati's memoirs, in the Duce's initial assessments, the number of "unworthy" members to be expelled was not supposed to exceed ten thousand), that is, in other words, politically counterproductive, and he eventually felt an ever-stronger need to cut short the "Giuriati cycle" and entrust the party to a man who would lead it entirely according to his criteria and serve merely as an executor of his will.

If one considers that these points of contention over the management of the PNF were soon joined by others of a more general nature—especially when Giuriati had taken the liberty of interfering in military matters, submitting (as we shall see later) to the Duce a series of proposals aimed at reorganizing the General Staff and the armed forces on new foundations, and had even dared to suggest the appointment of Balbo as Chief of the General Staff in place of Badoglio, it is understandable why Mussolini, as soon as the opportunity arose (the emergence of certain conflicts within the Directorate between Giuriati, Marinelli, and Starace), seized the chance to put an end to Giuriati's secretariat and call upon Starace to lead the party.

Starace's tenure was the longest in the entire history of the PNF: Giuriati's successor—a former

Bersaglieri officer, a valiant fighter, and an early-era fascist who had participated in leadership roles in major squadrist operations in Trentino and Puglia and who had served as deputy secretary of the PNF from October ’21 to October ’23 and then continuously from April ’26 under both Turati and Giuriati—in fact led the party for nearly eight years, from December 8, 1931, to October 31, 1939.

A true record, but not the only one. Starace’s secretariat—or the “Starace era,” as some have called these eight years, given their importance in the history of the regime—was also the one that surpassed all others in terms of criticism, unpopularity, and even ridicule, garnering negative assessments at every level and in every circle: across the country, among Fascists, pro-Fascists, and anti-Fascists, among the elderly and the young, abroad, in journalism, in memoirs, and in historiography; to the point that there were even those who—precisely on the basis of this unanimous negative assessment—went so far as to write that the date of his appointment to the PNF Secretariat “must be considered disastrous for the Fascist Party, since that day marked the beginning of the activities of the man who, through his grave errors, was among the factors that contributed to the dissolution of the regime’s power.”

However, especially when applied to Mussolini’s politics, a discussion of Starace’s secretariat cannot be limited to merely accepting such a judgment.

It is undisputed that Starace was a man of limited intelligence, driven by a narrow military mindset—and by no means a political one—that led him to confuse outward form and the appearance of things with their substance.

Hence his satisfaction and enthusiasm for results that were apparently grandiose but in reality ephemeral, such as the mobilization of masses that grew larger year after year but were organized according to essentially bureaucratic criteria, their participation in the life of the regime based solely on emotional and theatrical (and in part coercive) grounds, a “lifestyle” that—lacking content truly felt and expressed by an inner awareness of working toward a new society and of being able to contribute to its formation through one’s own creative input—was almost always the result solely of a generic, external, superficial, and often opportunistic adaptation to a ritual, a rhetoric, and top-down planning of the successive stages of the fascist curriculum, which, were therefore perceived as something foreign and imposed and aroused, depending on the case, boredom, impatience, skepticism, or derision.

Likewise, there is no doubt that the presence of such a man at the head of the PNF had a lasting impact on the entire moral fabric of the regime and exerted an undeniably negative influence on it.

It is impossible not to agree with even Starace’s most radical critics on this assessment.

As significant as this aspect of the Starace era may have been, it must nevertheless be noted that more important is the fact that during the 1930s the regime underwent certain transformations—perhaps not evident at first glance, but certainly substantial—that actually altered its internal balance and—contrary to appearances—not in Mussolini’s favor; transformations regarding which it is not possible, as has been said, to simply accept the judgment of those who have attributed responsibility for them, sic et simpliciter, to Starace.

There is no doubt that, because of Starace, the regime was the subject of widespread discredit, which cannot be underestimated but which must not be—at least in the immediate term—overestimated either, since, on closer inspection, the regime very often found in Starace a sort of lightning rod that, by drawing upon itself much of the unpopularity, criticism, and sarcasm, effectively shielded Mussolini from much of it (it is not without significance that in the enormous proliferation of jokes about Starace,

the party secretary was almost always portrayed as the fool, while Mussolini was the one who put him in a difficult position and exposed his foolishness); and this is so true that when Starace was finally ousted, his removal from the PNF secretariat immediately resulted in a flood of praise for the Duce's decision—which demonstrates how, for the most part, people had failed to grasp the true significance of his tenure as secretary and were under the illusion that, once the person responsible had been eliminated, things could be put back on track; Beyond this particular form of discredit (which was widespread especially during the final years of Starace's secretariat), in our view the most significant manifestations and consequences for the regime of the transformations that took place in the 1930s—and especially toward the end of that decade—were of three kinds, which can be summarized as follows:

- the depoliticization and bureaucratization of the PNF and its transformation into a mass super-organization geared toward consensus (see the attached table for the total number of forces organized within the PNF at the end of Starace's secretariat) deprived Mussolini of his only true instrument of political organization and, in case of necessity, of his only independent force; given the nature of the regime, the primary consequence of Starace's complete political dismantling of the PNF was that the individual components of the regime—and in particular the more traditionalist ones, foremost among them the bureaucracy—effectively swallowed up fascism and, in doing so, fundamentally undermined Mussolini's conception of the fascist state; Mussolini's state, in fact, even though formally composed entirely of men in black shirts and orbace, found itself resting on foundations—on traditional forces—which, while they supported it at the time and canceled each other out with their conflicting interests, needed Mussolini as an arbiter; under different circumstances, they would have been compelled to find a lowest common denominator among themselves, nothing truly prevented them from forming a coalition against Mussolini, since they were in fact the ones controlling the state, and the Duce no longer had his own means of self-defense—given that the PNF as such had been dissolved, and the MVSN, lacking a party worthy of the name behind it, was itself largely an amorphous force and, in any case, subjectively and objectively incapable of withstanding a potential showdown with the army; and the police were not an autonomous body with their own specific interests and ideology (as in Nazi Germany and the USSR) inextricably linked to that regime, but were themselves a component of the system upon which Mussolini's regime was founded, sharing the same problems as its other components; In this situation, as the party gradually ceased to function as an effective political instrument and, as a result, the Fascist leadership itself was transformed into a group of notables without any real power of their own—and thus, on the one hand, practically at the mercy of the Duce's whims and, on the other hand, without any concrete possibility of influencing his policies—Fascism increasingly and clearly evolved—partly due in part to the logic typical of modern authoritarian mass regimes, and in part to a conscious choice by Mussolini—a choice fostered and put into practice by Starace with a fervor and systematic approach (often grotesque) that influenced and shaped much of Italians' public life—into Mussolinism, and the regime became increasingly identified with the person of the Duce with each passing year; thanks to this identification—kept constantly alive by absolute control of the mass media and by the periodic use of emotional appeal through the increasingly frequent massive rallies and the conversational speeches the Duce delivered to the crowds—Mussolini's figure was the subject, throughout the 1930s, of continuous and growing glorification that undoubtedly contributed decisively to his prestige and, therefore, to his power (which derived a sort of collective endorsement from it) but which, just as undoubtedly, forced Mussolini into a style of politics that always required a state of emotional tension among the masses and which, consequently, could not afford any pauses; he had to constantly set new goals to achieve—each one a battle in its own right—and, above all, could absolutely not afford defeats, because—by its very nature—a fundamentally charismatic relationship such as the one that bound the majority of Italians to Mussolini during this period would not have withstood an obvious defeat: and, once that charismatic bond had failed, the

Duce would have found himself stripped of all real power, exposed, on the one hand, to the hostility of the disappointed and betrayed masses and, on the other hand, to the machinations of the various components of the regime, eager not to be swept away by its collapse and quite happy that the regime's identification with Mussolini's person allowed them to attempt to separate their own responsibilities from those of the Duce and, thus, to regain their freedom of maneuver;

- Once the PNF had been politically dismantled and the regime reduced to Mussolini's personal power, even the efforts to create a new fascist ruling class—the only way to try to avert the dangers inherent in the regime's new reality and to envision the survival of fascism, or rather, a new "fascist civilization" after Mussolini—failed miserably, and it was precisely among those who were supposed to form this new ruling class that the first signs of dissent began to emerge and cases of more or less explicit anti-fascism became more numerous.

If we move from the general to the particular, from an overall assessment to a close analysis of his most significant initiatives, Starace's secretariat appears characterized—especially during the period that most interests us here—by a massive effort in two directions: on the one hand, to achieve the definitive "organization" of the PNF and, around the party, of the country; on the other hand, to make the party the institution and instrument within and through which the moral and political education of the younger generations was to be completed and, thus, the training of the regime's new cadres—that is, the new fascist ruling class—was to be concretely realized.

In the first of these two directions, the new secretary—having definitively concluded the purge phase and decided to reopen membership registration one year later, on the occasion of the "tenth anniversary" celebrations of the "March on Rome"—immediately devoted himself with the utmost energy to:

a) reorganizing the PNF so as to firmly assume control of it, removing from key positions those who were intransigent or otherwise hostile to his policies and replacing them with others personally loyal to him or, at the very least, ready to obey him without hesitation—and thus putting the party in a position to smoothly accommodate the new members who would soon be flooding in;

b) to extend the PNF's control as far as possible over a whole series of organizations—some of which were already under its authority, while others it sought to strengthen and bring into its sphere of influence—so as to make the party the cornerstone, the organizing and disciplining center of ever-wider sectors of national life. A program—given the path chosen—that was not wrong in itself, but one need only leaf through the "Order Sheet," the "Directives Sheet," and the "Acts of the PNF" (whose publication was one of Starace's very first acts) to realize how the party secretary conceived and implemented it: not with actual political criteria and intentions (that is, aimed at fostering genuine participation and personal commitment capable of generating new energy, new ideas, and new leadership), but with a bureaucratic-military perspective that did not go beyond the mere organizational aspect, understood practically only as a tool for centralization, for rigid hierarchical control of everything and everyone, and for top-down planning of a "disciplined" participation (often following a precise ritual and choreographed direction) of as many Italians as possible in the life of the regime—which was, in turn, understood above all as a series of collective events designed to exalt the consensus surrounding Mussolini and his policies and to demonstrate fascism's ability to bind to itself and incorporate into its ranks all energies and forces, both active and less so.

The former through spontaneous adherence, the latter by virtue of the environment and atmosphere created around them and, above all, through a systematic campaign of coercion and propaganda, thanks

to which Starace was convinced that a sort of habit could eventually be created—one destined, under the influence of repetitive adaptation and individual emulation, to transform from passive to active.

In this regard, the following passage from a letter written by Starace in the summer of ’37 to Mussolini is telling. The letter was intended to refute the accusations leveled against him from various quarters for having made the use of barriers mandatory during party-organized rallies, in order to ensure “a spectacle of the most vibrant faith but also of order and discipline” and to avoid “any disorderly movements by unorganized masses”; all the more so because it also clearly illustrates what, according to the party secretary, the ideal relationship between the Duce and the Italian people should be:

This matter of the barriers, which has undoubtedly been the subject of some speculation, is, in my view, corroborated by other episodes that are now long past.

When, in accordance with your directives, I set out to organize the Italians and provide them with uniforms, it seemed—judging by the comments—that everything was bound to go awry. When I floated the idea of giving women a uniform as well, they declared me buried ten meters underground, complete with a tombstone on which the following epitaph was to be engraved: “Here lies Starace dressed in orbace—requiescat in pace.”

Today it’s a competition, and everyone takes pride in the uniform. Even the women have asked to wear the sahariana, and I have allowed its optional use (model attached).

When the tram tracks were torn up in Rome and silent traffic was mandated, it seemed as though the capital were about to sink.

Today, the trams cause the same annoyance as the clanging of scrap metal, and when a driver makes the mistake of sounding the horn, passersby stop, at the very least out of curiosity.

I am certain that, in time, the barriers will become commonplace, and everyone will be pleased with this innovation which, as I wrote earlier, ensures the personal safety of those participating in demonstrations.

On the other hand, it should be a welcome change in every respect—if not the complete elimination of the police cordons, which remind us of times gone by, then at least their reduction, which this system will make possible to a significant degree.

Finally, even if we assume that the Party—which is responsible for organizing the rallies—was forced to resort to a measure deemed excessive, this demonstrates that, at the end of the first fifteen years of the Fascist regime—during which, among other things, one war began and ended, another is currently underway, and a third could appear on the horizon at any moment— the Italian people, in the presence of the DUCE, must be kept in check as best as possible to prevent their ever-growing enthusiasm from overwhelming the one who leads them.

Consistent with this conception of the party, Starace's first priority was to adopt new, strict regulations for the Youth Fasci, the GUF, the Women's Fasci, and the national Fascist organizations representing schools, civil servants, railroad workers, postal and telegraph workers, and employees of state-owned industrial enterprises.

Having done this, he drafted a new PNF charter, which on the surface did not differ greatly from the previous one of 1929, but which clearly reflected the party's new character and the new tasks it was to undertake—and, above all, its complete political subordination to Mussolini.

The main innovations introduced in the new charter (which remained in effect until 1938, the year in which it was replaced by yet another, destined to last—with some subsequent minor amendments—until July 1933) concerned, in fact, the figure and powers of the Duce (referred to as such in all articles, even those dealing with his relations with the Crown, in regard to which the 1929 statute used the title "Head of Government, Prime Minister, Secretary of State" instead. The 1929 statute (Art. 3) stated that the PNF carried out its activities "under the supreme guidance of the Duce and in accordance with the directives set forth by the Grand Council"; in the new statute, this formulation was retained (Art. 5), but its significance was greatly diminished by the new wording of Article 1, which—completely ignoring the Grand Council—definitively established the PNF's absolute dependence on Mussolini: "The National Fascist Party is a civilian militia, under the command of the DUCE, in the service of the Fascist State."

To confirm the new tasks—essentially organizational, propagandistic, and focused on the education of the younger generations—that the party was to undertake, the new charter then specified which organizations were subordinate to the PNF, in addition to those we have already mentioned when discussing the new structures previously established, namely the OND and the CONI, to which numerous others were added in subsequent years.

At the same time, Starace gave a significant boost to the ONB and the entire Fascist youth movement, initiating a process of gradually expanding the organization of youth that would culminate in 1937 with the establishment of a single organization, the GIL, which would inherit the legacy of both the ONB and the Fasci giovanili and the Giovani fasciste and would organize all young people of both sexes aged six to twenty-one.

In this context, the GUF were also significantly strengthened, above all through the promotion of sports and competitive activities (the "Littoriali dello sport"), which Starace considered the most suitable

means of mobilizing and binding the mass of university students to the regime.

Starace's most politically significant act, however, was undoubtedly the reopening of party membership during the "tenth-anniversary" celebrations. In one year, approximately 500,000 applications were submitted; most were accepted, causing the number of members to jump from 1,007,231 in October 1932 to 1,415,407 in October 1933.

An increase of nearly 50 percent which, on the one hand, served as a sort of mass poll of public opinion for the regime in anticipation of the new elections to be held in '34, but on the other hand—by transforming the PNF into a bloated organization lacking homogeneity and character, in which the remnants of old-style fascism were drowned out by a mass of new members who had joined, all too often, merely out of a vague sense of patriotism or, worse, sheer opportunism—allowed Starace to finally carry out Mussolini's intention of rendering the party completely incapable of any independent political initiative.

So much so that it is certainly no exaggeration to say that it was in 1933 that the PNF was definitively liquidated politically, and remained only in fascist rhetoric as one of the regime's pillars.

At this point in our discussion, before moving on to discuss the second direction in which Starace steered his work as secretary of the PNF, it is necessary to pause briefly—a step essential for understanding both the profound crisis that, in the years following 1933, began to progressively plague the regime in its relations with a series of circles on which Mussolini had instead counted for his regime's development, and the actual causes of this crisis.

To anyone today who critically retraces and examines the history of the PNF in the 1930s, the very close cause-and-effect relationship linking the depoliticization and bureaucratization of the party to the crisis of the PNF as an instrument of Mussolini's politics and as a pillar of the regime is clear.

And this is despite the fact that, in the intentions of the Duce and Starace, the depoliticization of the PNF (of which bureaucratization was largely a consequence) was not supposed to result in the dissolution (but rather in the strengthening) of the party as a "political" instrument for mass organization and the education of the new ruling class—and, therefore, of the younger generations.

In light of these two facts, it is absolutely impossible to settle for a pseudo-explanation such as one based on Starace's harmful and deleterious influence and his errors.

Starace was certainly a figure who was politically—that is, in terms of political sensibility—almost nonexistent (and Mussolini was aware of this and had chosen him, in addition to his seniority as deputy secretary, precisely for this reason: to no longer have to deal with secretaries endowed with a strong political personality and, and therefore inclined to assert their own role and autonomy) and, moreover—as we have already noted—of limited intelligence and a narrow-minded, military-style mentality.

Hence his obsession with "style," with uniforms, with choreographed displays; his authoritarianism; his claim to run the party as something halfway between a ministry and a barracks; his unbridled rhetorical bombast; his desire to orchestrate everything from above in a "totalitarian" manner; hence, in short, everything that ultimately turned him into an almost grotesque figure and drew upon him countless sarcasms and hatreds and—most importantly—spread "Staracism" throughout all levels of the Fascist hierarchy, that is, his particular way of understanding and exercising power—and, more than power, command—concerning himself more with appearances than with substance and failing to realize the

negative consequences this had not only for the country's education and morals but also for the prestige of the regime and of Fascism.

Starace, however, during the approximately eight years in which he led the PNF and, through it, shaped a whole series of aspects of the regime's and the country's life, always acted in unison with Mussolini; he practically never had any real disagreements with him regarding his conception and implementation of the party's role; if Mussolini ever had cause to complain to him, it was only over minor issues (primarily due to some overzealousness or initiatives that had provoked counterproductive reactions), never over politically significant or fundamental matters; and if—in the end—he removed him from the party secretariat, it was because he believed that eight years in power had worn him down and that it was now necessary to "make way for the young" even at the party's top leadership, and above all because he had realized that the discredit Starace had brought upon himself—which had by then spread throughout the country—risked, if he did not intervene, reflecting negatively on him.

On all fundamental issues, Starace was, in practice, nothing more than a faithful and zealous executor of the policies laid out by Mussolini.

The decision to put an end to the purge of the PNF, to reopen membership, and not to limit it to a select few but, on the contrary, to give it the character of a mass plebiscite, had been announced by the Duce even before he entrusted the party to Starace.

On October 24, 1931, in Naples, speaking to the federal directors of the PNF, he had in fact said:

It is time to stop viewing long-standing membership in the Party as a privilege. This is a legitimate source of pride for those who sacrificed so much and worked so hard for the triumph of the Black Shirt revolution, but it cannot constitute an obstacle to the influx of new forces into the ranks of Fascism, just as it cannot serve as sufficient grounds for further reviews of Party membership…

On the following December 12, upon installing the party's new National Directorate, Mussolini had given Starace a very specific directive: based on this "directive," in June 1934 the federal secretaries of the PNF were mandated to control prices.

At that time, the task of the party and all organizations under its authority was to mobilize "to tackle the economic crisis and to alleviate, through the operation of welfare agencies and institutions, the situation of those segments of the population facing the greatest hardship":

Every cell has the strict duty to adopt a code of conduct appropriate to the situation and the no less

strict duty to combat all defeatism, all profiteering, and all rumor-mongering, and to identify those who, under any guise or pretext, attempt to exploit the current economic situation. Such enemies must be brought to justice under the laws of the regime and removed from circulation.

At the same time, the Party must carry out an intensive propaganda campaign aimed at highlighting what has been done in Italy to alleviate the crisis, emphasizing public works and assistance—which must not take the form of charity, but rather that of an act of human, national, and Fascist solidarity.

As can be seen, this directive is purely executive in nature, limited to the fields of propaganda, welfare, and policing—and which remained completely silent on any form of Party participation not only in the governance of the state—which was obvious given Mussolini's position on this matter—but even in the formulation of solutions and measures to address the crisis; and which—under the pretext of the gravity of the economic situation and the need to focus primarily on it—carefully avoided even the slightest mention of thepossibility that, once the crisis had been overcome, the PNF might be entrusted with other, more strictly political tasks.

A mandate, therefore, far less "active" and inspiring than the one Mussolini had given to Giuriati a little over a year earlier; at that time—while already placing the economic situation and the tasks it created for the PNF at the center of everything—the Duce had held out before the party's eyes a "future to be conquered" and had spoken of "reaching beyond the present" and of a "tirelessness" that were to be "the heroic sign of fascist faith"; Now, however—while remaining completely silent on the party's future tasks—he had revealed his true intention: even after the economic crisis had been overcome, the PNF was essentially to be entrusted only with executive tasks, namely the implementation of his directives and policies on a mass scale.

Starace always conformed to these fundamental directives—as well as to the others that Mussolini gradually gave him—with a scrupulousness, loyalty, and zeal that—not coincidentally—led the Duce to call him his faithful "mastiff."

Given these circumstances, it is clear that it is unfair to attribute responsibility for the crisis—which began to plague the regime from within during the years of his secretariat and particularly after 1933—entirely to Starace: if the crisis stemmed from mistakes, these were certainly primarily Mussolini's, and "Staracism" itself was in fact the price that Mussolini—until it became untenable for him—paid in order not to lose such a faithful executor of his own policies.

However, in our view, speaking of "mistakes"—even if they were Mussolini's and not Starace's—is misleading and overly simplistic.

There is no doubt that Mussolini made mistakes; however, the crisis that began to plague the regime in those years—despite the improvement in the economic situation and the success of the war in Ethiopia—depended only minimally on these mistakes, which—at most—merely hastened its onset.

Its causes were, in fact, deeper, rooted in the very nature of the regime and in the contradictions that

have undermined all the more or less fully totalitarian regimes of our time.

By politically dismantling the PNF, Mussolini—as has been noted—significantly weakened the regime and, in the long run, his own personal power, and forced himself into an increasingly activist policy that was ever more conditioned by the pursuit and attainment of success.

If we broaden our perspective for a moment to encompass the entire historical span of the regime, it seems evident to us, however, that with his decision—the psychological and political motivations for which, both long-standing and recent, we have already examined—Mussolini did nothing more than hasten the onset of the crisis, just as—in the final analysis—participation in World War II alongside Germany and military defeat would have done.

The true and sole reason for the regime's crisis—the one that, even without Mussolini's mistakes, even without the traumatic cause of military defeat, would have led to its demise all the same—albeit, of course, over a longer period of time and through evolution and transformation rather than violent death—was another: it was the impossibility—due to the contradiction "that does not allow it"—of creating its own new ruling class, which alone would have enabled it to perpetuate itself across new generations and thus project itself into the future.

From this perspective, the failure of Starace's policy—that is, as usual, Mussolini's—aimed precisely at making the PNF the instrument for educating and training the new fascist cadres is truly exemplary.

The issue of young people, their integration into the PNF, and above all their active participation in the life of the regime had already been raised during Turati's time, primarily by the "Critica fascista" group—perhaps the first to speak explicitly about it, and certainly the one that, more than any other, had understood its decisive importance for fascism.

In the wake of the initial positions taken by Botta's journal, in the second half of 1929 the discussion had rapidly spread to virtually all circles and all the major Fascist organizations, provoking various reactions; while many had welcomed the idea of empowering young people, there were also those who were concerned and did not hide a twofold fear: that the young might end up supplanting and sidelining the older generation from the positions they held, or—less petty but no less intense—that the young might push Fascism and the regime off the placid track on which they had by then set out and drive them toward who knows what dangerous social adventures.

The debate had quickly become so heated that in January 1930 Mussolini felt the need—if not to put an end to it outright—to steer it with a note that appeared anonymously in the *Foglio d'ordini* of January 20, but which *Critica fascista*, to give it greater prominence, published in Mussolini's own handwriting ten days later.

Under the title "Key Points on Youth," Mussolini, after asserting that the regime was and must remain "a regime of young people," emphasized three concepts in particular:

The Regime intends to spiritually prepare all Italian youth, from whom—through successive selections—the series of ruling classes of tomorrow's Fascist state must emerge; to this end, it has created, alongside the Party's civilian militia, the organizations of the Balilla, the Avanguardisti, and the Fascist University Groups.

The totalitarian principle of youth education—systematically championed by Fascism—responds to this supreme necessity of the Fascist Revolution, which aims to “endure,” that is, “to be continued into the future.”

Alongside this general preparation, young people—and the very youngest, that is, those who were unable to participate in the war and the revolution—must be resolutely guided toward training within the hierarchies of political, administrative, labor union, journalistic, cooperative, educational, military, athletic, and recreational life, etc., without petty jealousies or unfounded fears.

When put to the severe test of life, the least suitable will fall by the wayside, while the best will rise to ever higher positions of command and responsibility.

Young people—more than others—must know how to obey in order to earn the right—or rather, the duty—to command; more than others, they must know how to take risks; more than others, they must reject any ideal of life—whether individual or collective—based on indifference or, worse, “comfort.”

In the editorial of the same issue, “Training for Responsibility,” published in *Critica* on February 1, 1930, Bottai’s journal made no secret of its delight at the article and authoritatively endorsed the campaign it had been waging in the preceding months. In particular, it emphasized one concept: “A regime that does not wish to become rigid in its methods and preconceptions, and to preclude any possibility of improvement and renewal, must maintain spiritual and practical contact with the people.

Proof of the truth of this assertion is provided precisely by the democratic regime, which, having been founded exclusively on the generation of fifty-year-olds, failed the test—above all because it found itself pitted against the young people of the universities, whom it considered alien to its own experience.” Given these conditions, the young people of today and tomorrow will be the successors—in spirit and in form—of the October Revolution of ’22. A revolution still on the rise, since many goals have yet to be achieved.”

Along these lines, Turati had immediately taken steps to include a representative from the GUF among nearly all the party’s federal directors.

His successor, Giuriati, had in turn established the Youth Fasci (which had been entrusted to Carlo Scorza) and had also provided them with their own high-circulation illustrated weekly, *Gioventù fascista*.

During Giuriati's tenure as secretary, however, at the youth level, fascism's primary effort was directed toward maximizing its political, cultural, and organizational control over young people, particularly university students.

Between 1926 and 1928, the GUF had supplanted and absorbed all the old university organizations, both the traditional and more or less apolitical ones and the anti-fascist Unione goliardica per la libertà; the only one to survive was the Catholic organization, the FUCI; hence the violent action undertaken in 1931 by Giuriati and, above all, by Scorza on Mussolini's orders against the FUCI, which—though, as will be seen later, it did not lead to its elimination—significantly limited its ability to penetrate university student circles and succeeded, at least for the time being, in almost completely depoliticizing its activities.

The massive effort devoted to this action, however, had the immediate consequence of partially slowing down the broader effort aimed at promoting young Fascists, which, in fact, entered its phase of systematic implementation primarily after 1931, under Starace's leadership.

As we have already noted, Starace's first priority was to bring the various youth organizations under stricter control and to strengthen them to the fullest extent possible.

The new secretary of the PNF paid particular attention to the mechanism of the annual "Fascist recruitment drive," striving to reduce the "enormous attrition" that occurred when young people were supposed to join the party.

Starace's greatest effort, however, was directed toward the political and ideological training of young people—especially university students—through a series of initiatives (strengthening the Sandro Italico Mussolini School of Fascist Mysticism, establishing service rotations for young people at party federations and two-year political training courses, encouraging university and youth publications, the creation of the GUF Experimental Theater, the development of the Cine-GUF and the GUF's theater, radio, and music sections, etc.) that reached its peak in 1932, when it was decided to establish cultural and artistic Littoriali alongside the sports Littoriali.

We will have the opportunity to discuss this important initiative—certainly the most significant among those undertaken by the regime to mobilize university students and to inject new, politically oriented energy into the world of culture—at length in the next volume.

For now, it suffices to say that—held for the first time in 1933 (not coincidentally at a time when the corporatist debate, that is, on the regime's social future, was entering a new phase)— — the Littoriali of Culture and Art grew year by year (until 1940, when, due to the war, they were held for the last time), expanding both in terms of the number of participants and the topics addressed, as well as through initiatives more or less connected to them (in 1934 the Ludi Juveniles were established, in 1935 the Littoriali of Labor, and in 1940 the Women's Littoriali of Culture, Art, and Labor), and became the regime's primary tool for selecting the cadres of the new ruling class and, above all, for gauging the political and cultural trends and orientations that were taking shape among the younger generations.

Thanks to this complex of initiatives, by the mid-1930s, the integration of the new generation—that generation which, in Mussolini's words, had experienced neither the 1915–18 war nor the Fascist "revolution"—into the PNF and its relationship with the regime had undoubtedly become extensive and intense.

If one does not settle for a superficial view of reality and does not allow oneself to be swayed by the grandeur of the figures and, above all, by the constant assertions of the press and the regime's propaganda—according to which young people had by then become the backbone of Fascism and constituted its surest asset for the future—one cannot help but note, however, that this framework and this relationship were in reality, despite all the regime's efforts, far less totalitarian and, above all, far less effective than Mussolini would have wished; and—most importantly—that, precisely around the mid-1930s, a state of mind began to emerge among young people that could not fail to alarm those who were concerned with the long-term survival of fascism and realized that this would inevitably depend on the attitude of the younger generations.

A state of mind that, as the years passed, became increasingly distinct and widespread and that—even if, on a mass level, it did not translate into a rejection of fascism or a shift toward antifascism—manifested itself, among the majority of those who were supposed to form the new fascist ruling class, on the one hand, in a superficial and opportunistic participation (driven by their own individual interests) in the life of the regime and, on the other hand, in a sort of moral unease—difficult to define precisely or generalize—but which, broadly speaking, can be summarized as the result of two conflicting convictions: the belief that the time had now come for fascism to rethink itself in new terms—no longer tied to the experience and needs of the years of the seizure and consolidation of power, to the alliances of that time, and to the economic and social policies that had emerged from them—and to embark concretely on the path of a substantial revolution, an effective renewal of basic moral and cultural values, and a new, one that was socially more just and more democratic, for Italian society—such that it would truly constitute a break not only with the pre-Fascist era but also with the work of restoration pursued thus far by the regime, and the beginning of a genuinely new "civilization," capable of developing on its own even after Mussolini's death; and that—on the contrary—with each passing year, fascism, instead of becoming more dynamic, became more static, increasingly incapable of bold and groundbreaking initiatives and, above all, of renewing itself, so that the contribution to the regime's politics by those young people who were supposed to form the new ruling class (and who, in Spampanato's words, wanted to forge their own conscience and bring to life a regime in which they would be allowed "to move not as cold, forgetful automatons, nor as blind, silent soldiers, but as creators and interpreters of their own time")—while on the one hand this contribution was encouraged, on the other it was constrained within the very reality (moral, cultural, bureaucratic, social) that they sought to renew and overcome, and thus amounted to little more than a circular argument.

A state of mind, therefore, which—in both cases—largely nullified the regime's efforts to create a new ruling class actively and enthusiastically committed to carrying out its policies; in the first case, in fact, it translated into an attitude of indifference and bureaucratic routine that obviously ruled out the possibility of genuine commitment and behavior that would serve as a model for the younger generation; in the second case, however, it ended up translating either into withdrawal and alienation from political activity due to disappointment, or into an attitude of impatience and criticism toward the regime's most reactionary and stale initiatives and events, or, at best, into a more or less pronounced position of dissent which, in certain circumstances (which became more numerous over time), could even lead down the slippery slope toward outright anti-fascism, or toward an increasingly activist and, in its own way, moralistic form of fascism, for which war became a test of moral strength and faith and, at the same time, a means of establishing the empire "in the full metaphysical and geographical sense of the term," to make fascism strong enough to embark on the path of revolution and to ensure that young people earned the merits necessary to emerge from the state of moral and political immaturity in which—despite declarations to the contrary—the old fascists who had "made the revolution" and brought Mussolini to power tended to keep them.

The best documentation regarding this state of mind and its consequences in terms of political behavior and psychological and moral attitudes toward the fascist reality can be gleaned from a systematic examination of the fascist press of the first half of the 1930s.

Not so much from the daily, more official press—which already clearly tended to treat the "youth problem" in triumphalist terms and thus preferred to gloss over anything that did not fit within the narrative it sought to legitimize at all costs—but rather from the political-cultural press affiliated either with the youth groups themselves or with certain groups that positioned themselves, from a generational perspective and in terms of psychological and political integration, straddled the line between the first and second generations of Fascists (as typified by *Selvaggio* and *L'Universale*) or, still, to certain figures within the Fascist establishment itself who were more open-minded and sensitive to the significance that the attitude of the younger generations would have for the regime's future (as typified by *Critica fascista*).

In this press, one can find explicit acknowledgments of the crisis that was beginning to trouble young people, as well as a whole series of statements that allow one to form a precise idea both of the general characteristics of this crisis and of the extent and timing of its spread (clearly linked to the fading of the hopes and expectations aroused, between 1929 and 1933, first by the hypotheses and controversies surrounding corporatism and then by the establishment of the IRI), as well as of its most characteristic manifestations.

What interests us most here, however, is that a careful examination of this press reveals clearly the emergence—from the very first manifestations of this new state of mind among young people—of two distinct ways of interpreting and judging its meaning and political implications: one approach we might call "revisionist" and another we might, instead, call "intransigent."

For the former, if one truly wished to address and positively resolve the problem of the youth and turn them into the new fascist ruling class, what mattered was understanding and meeting their needs—and not thwarting their yearning, to quote Bottai, to rethink everything, including fascism itself, and to assert their ideas against those of the older fascists in a dialogue among equals.

What mattered was that the young people wanted to get involved and wanted to make their contribution to fascism as fascists.

The other aspects, the other manifestations of their attitude, were essentially secondary—the result of youthful exuberance and extremism and therefore transitory, or consequences of their dissatisfaction and disappointment at not feeling understood or truly put to the test on an equal footing with their elders; sometimes even the consequence of how the party had framed and carried out its "make way for the youth" policy.

Typical in this regard is what is written in the October 15, 1930, editorial of *Critica fascista* dedicated to the Youth in the Party:

To ensure that a good principle does not give rise to harmful outcomes, it is important to recognize from the outset that the effectiveness of the Youth Fasci will depend not only on strict discipline, not only on a vigorous and careful selection process, but also on the degree of vitality that can be instilled

in these new organizations—vitality that must lead young people to regard them as their natural arena for action and for the expression of their ideas, feelings, and moral life… Nor must we forget that a highly subversive spirit exists among young people, which drives them to remake what has been done, to destroy in order to rebuild anew, and to criticize on the basis of an optimism that is innate to them.

To stifle this spirit by confining it within the ironclad limits of a pre-established discipline would be tantamount to compromising the experiment or profoundly distorting it. It would be far wiser to make measured use of it, directing young Fascists toward that work of continuous renewal which every revolution requires.

Consistent with this view of the issue, groups such as “Critica fascista,” “L’Universale,” and “Selvaggio”—to name only the most important ones—while not holding back on criticism of individual stances and certain ill-timed demands, not only avoided addressing the “youth problem” in the triumphalist or purely bureaucratic-disciplinary manner in which the PNF and the major press outlets generally addressed it, but they strove to address what were in fact the underlying needs, demands, and grievances of young people; first and foremost those stemming from their reluctance to passively accept the revealed truths that the party and the official press sought to impose on them and have them internalize “disciplinedly,” in the name of an “orthodoxy” that could not be questioned.

Let us avoid indoctrinating young people: the first spiritual impulse of young people who begin to think for themselves is, as we know, one of independence and rebellion against what is imposed on them or taught to them, and against the environment that surrounds them. Young people are by nature rebellious, and it is good that they are so.

Let us not, therefore, turn Fascism into a dogma imposed through the school system, but let us instill in young people a healthy discipline of the spirit and provide them with the cultural and doctrinal tools through which—by means of a critical process matured seriously and serenely—they may freely and consciously embrace Fascism, making it a living and active reality within their spirit.

Too much orthodoxy, we said. Too much unanimity—and unanimity is not necessarily harmony. Advantages? There are some, but there are also dangers. Foremost among them is the danger of an empire of mediocrity. No one is better suited to perfectly represent an era than the mediocre. To represent, not to express, of course; much less to enhance…

And we do not believe it is really necessary to choose between present-day uniformity and that of the

past, which still survives here and there; between the poor political literature of the 1910s and that of the 19th century; in short, between fascist rhetoric and liberal discourse. There is something better—and perhaps more fascist—beyond these discourses.

There are a few people in Italy—young people, at that—who are now beginning to recognize and count themselves among one another; people who do not feel destined to be anyone's loyal follower; who test the waters, probe, and shift their perspective, sometimes border on heresy, and would rather make a mistake than sway between comfortable patterns; who speak their own language and have their own, clearly recognizable ideas; who view the present solely in terms of the future—a future with strong legs and a tremendous desire to move forward.

Political necessities and opportunities, as well as the circumstances of the environment and the moment, may legitimately rein in these compromising vanguards—lest they cause some trouble.

But no one is permitted to ignore their existence, nor to fail to take them into account when assessing a future that promises to be laden with tasks somewhat greater than those of mere faithful interpreters—a future that will require, above all, individuality, boldness of thought and action, and men who stand apart from the crowd.

Admonitions and exhortations such as these were by no means uncommon in the first half of the 1930s and clearly illustrate how the magazines that published them simultaneously echoed some of the most basic—yet also most significant—manifestations of youthful discontent, for example, the widespread dissatisfaction with the trite, propagandistic, and jingoistic tone of the daily press and much of the periodical press, with its vacuous and uninspired official stance, its unyielding orthodoxy, and its superficiality.

Criticism—sometimes harsh—of this approach to news and the moral and political education of the masses had already emerged in previous years; however, by 1930–31, the discourse on the press had become one of the recurring themes through which the discontent of the second generation of Fascists manifested itself, and it appeared with increasing frequency in "revisionist" political-cultural magazines as well.

While in *L'Universale* (November '37) Berto Ricci reduced it almost to a polemical and irritated quip—"A rally is not Austerlitz; a festive train is not the March on Rome. "We call on the press to exercise common sense and moderation," *Critica fascista* turned it into a matter of moral and political conduct and—while not getting to its root—focused on it more sharply than any other magazine of the Fascist establishment: it denounced the phenomenon and warned against the "national disease" of "trivial Pindarism" and the constant resort to "genuine grandstanding" —which were, moreover, useless, "since even the strongest sauce grows on the palate, and in the end it goes down as

if it were bland”—but it also sketched out, albeit timidly, an analysis of some of its causes, the very ones generally pointed out by the youth press:

The press now holds little interest for the public because it is too uniform. This is nothing new, but it is, nonetheless, a truth. Daily newspapers often reduce their role to mere news reporting. The best ones focus on the front page, the others on the back page. Few—very few—editors write the classic editorial, one that distills ideas and concepts of any real value. Among weekly publications, the situation is better, but only slightly. Because a large percentage of them are cobbled together from clippings or bulletins from the provincial economic councils.

Is the regime, however, responsible for this uniformity in the press?

I do not believe so, and it is worth speaking frankly on this matter: because the laws governing the press do not authorize anyone to say, to assert, or even to whisper, that freedom of the press itself ceased to exist at a specific moment.

The only men who have the right to issue general political directives—the Duce and the Party Secretary—have stated repeatedly that discussion is possible, that discussion is necessary… With only two exceptions: discussing the Duce, which 42 million Italians would not tolerate, and questioning the very few fundamental ideas of the Regime.

Everything else, for both the government and the Party, is open to discussion. If this were not the case, this very magazine would be at fault, since it is precisely within its pages that discussions have begun and unfolded.

Why, then, is there so little discussion while there is so much whispering?

Because, moreover, discussion presupposes the possession of ideas and the courage to express them. I say “courage” because there are too many who fear any misfortune that might jeopardize the “career” to which they believe themselves destined.

Because, especially in the press, debate can pose a danger, since there is always someone more royalist than the King, and the interpretation of the central leadership’s will is not always accurate at the

periphery. This contributes to a certain… lack of courage among men who, by necessity, must sometimes pit their material interests—represented by their monthly salary—against their ideas; that salary is at risk when, as often happens, the CEO of the company that owns the newspaper prefers an inactive editor-in-chief who causes no trouble to one who breathes life into the publication, with all the possible consequences of that vitality.

Having set out on this path, for the revisionists the “problem of the youth” could, in short, be resolved in only one way: by liberalizing fascism, concretely restoring the value of individual contribution, and restoring to the PNF the character of a party in which the “rank-and-file member” gave his loyalty but was not merely “just another extra to be conscripted for rallies, just another membership card to be renewed at the beginning of the year, or one of the many who, through their solidarity, ensured the development of welfare initiatives,” but a man who participated “actively and directly.”

As Agostino Nasti wrote in 1933:

Fascism, “in order to shape men—citizens and leaders—and to leave its mark on Italians,” had to “unify, centralize, and place everything under its own control,” teach everything, “from how to respect the national flag to how to travel by train,” and, therefore, “meddle in everything,” “silence many voices, whether discordant or out of tune,” “restrict and suppress autonomy or opportunities for initiative”; in principle, there could be no doubt whatsoever about the necessity of all this; however, one must also acknowledge that “it sometimes happens that, here and there, one senses points of friction, states of unease, which give pause and raise a problem”: That is, one gets the impression that too little room has been left for the expression of individuality. And it would be very strange if, even within a system in which institutions have been established that so effectively balance individualistic and state-oriented needs, it were then found in practice that this balance, in fact, does not exist…

Why, in practice, does the balance break down between authoritarian, directive demands and self-sufficient, individual demands—between authority and freedom? Between the needs of education and those of the spontaneous, solid, and lasting formation of individual political consciousness?

This is not an idle question, for the issue is by no means trivial. Does the prevalence of the state, at the expense of free individual development, not risk numbing individual consciousness? Does it not stifle the spirit of initiative? Does it not—rather than correcting it—instill in the Italian character a passive reliance on the state? On this point, in particular, we must be careful, because as long as the State appears not as a creation of the people themselves—constituting a continuous duty—but as an external and alien reality, existing in and of itself, a political consciousness will not form among citizens, and the State will exist only as a bureaucratic framework. And this is certainly not the ideal goal of the Revolution.

As is clear, this was a speech that positively acknowledged the underlying causes of the discontent plaguing so much of the youth and preventing them from truly integrating into the life of the regime as its genuine expression and its new, organic ruling class.

A speech, moreover, that lacked any real political perspective because it either ended up converging on the old controversy over the nature and role of the PNF—a controversy that, having taken the path of the "hyper-party" that sought to encompass the entirety of the citizenry, had by then become increasingly sterile, as evidenced by its dragging on throughout the regime's entire duration without having the slightest impact on its reality; or it was reduced to an exhortation to fascism to address the need to resolve, in a more functional manner, the relationship between state unity and individual initiative—an exhortation that was likely sincere, but which, by the time fascism was moving toward totalitarianism—which, to quote Bottai, "by taking the demand for unity to its extreme limits—and often beyond them—centralizes and concentrates powers, functions, and tasks, leading to a progressive impoverishment and annihilation of initiative," or it was an absurdity, or it would necessarily lead anyone who set out to put it into practice onto a path that had nothing in common with that of Fascism.

On this last point, four extensive articles published between late 1931 and mid-1932 by Camillo Pellizzi in *Il Selvaggio*, in the form of letters to the editor (M. Maccari), are truly revealing.

The analysis of the moral condition and political evolution of so many young people presented in these articles is almost certainly the most lucid and far-sighted thing ever written from the fascist perspective; unwittingly, however, it also constitutes the best demonstration of the intrinsic impossibility for fascism to give rise to its own organic ruling class capable of perpetuating it.

For Pellizzi, the attitude of young people should be understood, not deplored. One had to realize that they had not participated in the events that had led their fathers to choose fascism and that they found themselves living in a reality characterized, for them, by:

a) a fascist elite that, for the most part, had remained stuck in the mindset of fourteen years earlier—a mindset "absolutely necessary then, but deleterious and negative today";

b) by the claim that all major political and social problems had already been resolved in theory and were well on their way to being solved in practice, whereas for them these issues were still largely unresolved or insufficiently addressed;

c) by a de facto situation in which not only was no active contribution required of them (the corporatist system itself—that is, the most characteristic instrument of the new fascist society—"is today a rather costly bureaucracy, armed with laws, decrees, and courts, which looms over—that is, sits above—the economic, and therefore social and moral, life of the masses, and the masses have no direct part in it"), but only to act as executors, and even those who acted "seriously and in good faith" could not be certain they would not sooner or later face the wrath of some party leader or the intervention of a Public Security commissioner.

In this situation, to think that a fascist political ruling class was forming was an illusion:

In reality, a new, closed class of political and corporatist officials began to take shape. A political class is something else entirely: it signifies a vast segment of the population for whom a given political regime represents a spontaneous and imperative need, both moral and practical. This political class not only does not exist within the regime, but shows no signs of forming; nor could it, given the methods that have been followed thus far.

The regime to date can be summed up in three words: Mussolini, the squadrismo, and a bureaucracy. Young people are taught not to doubt or question, and this is not entirely bad; but when they then begin to want to think for themselves, it becomes clear that they lack both the character and the training to do so without falling into the most futile and ridiculous heterodoxies; from which they subsequently move on to an attitude somewhere between apathy and hypocrisy within a façade of discipline.

From all this, we conclude that a revolution, such as ours, must educate both young people and adults; but it must educate them by openly presenting before them—and within them—the problems of reality, rather than merely imposing conventional formulas and outward forms.

What is needed is an intense and lively, entirely open movement of ideas, and the corresponding movement of men (because ideas arise from men, and not the other way around).

True men gathered around Man. Hence—again, according to Pellizzi—the need to put an end to the "fascism of the squadrons and legions," "brotherhood fascism," "public safety fascism," and "charity fascism"—and to bring about "revolutionary fascism," without which not only would fascism be reduced to a mere historical episode, but it was far from unlikely that the youth would turn toward solutions antithetical to fascism.

The "most intelligent and spirited" young people, in fact, if they did not become true fascists, would sooner or later become communists:

"Do you know, Maccari," he wrote in the second article-letter, "what the secret sympathies of the most intelligent and spirited young people among the newest generations are? You do, but I'll repeat it to you anyway: they're for communism. A danger? No; but certainly a serious symptom." You and I came of age in times of pseudo-freedom and disorder, of official cowardice and private mistrust; we belong to that generation which, during the war and in the postwar period, had to carve out for itself—one might say from nothing—a homeland, a state, and a positive

and creative principle of civil life.

For us, fascism is something we chose and is therefore a positive value; but for the very young—who, having stayed at home, saw only the negative and worst aspects of the war, and to whom fascism was, so to speak, imposed by us—it is merely a matter of choosing between one form of subordination or servitude and another.

And young people, above all, always choose what they do not have: what is distant, unknown, and therefore magnificent. They cannot read a newspaper or magazine that does not repeat the same things every day; not a single party leader opens his mouth without repeating the same refrains; there is no fascist book that does not rehash the same old ideas yet again: nothing has contributed to developing in those young people a sense of spiritual autonomy or freedom.

And if slavery is to be their lot, they seek out the most distant, harshest, most total, and most tragic form of it; if renunciation and sacrifice are to be their lot, they yearn for a total and universal renunciation, a complete sacrifice of the self.

Thus far is the more strictly analytical part of Pellizzi's articles.

To fully assess their significance, however, it is necessary to examine in depth what their author meant by "Fascism-revolution." In his discourse, in fact, while this expression served to outline various demands typical of left-wing Fascism in its most strictly youthful sense, one demand in particular went considerably beyond what could be found even in the most extremist youth publications.

Among the former demands, two were the most significant: the need for corporatism to evolve and finally take shape as "free communism," and the one that Pellizzi summarized in the paradox—which he described as "not all that paradoxical"—of the need to put an end to the usual rotations of party leaders ("rotation, by perfect geometric analogy, always takes place within the same quadrant, and among the same pool of candidates") and instead to proceed with a "complete replacement of the hierarchy," so as to adapt the regime's elite to the country's new reality, concretely integrate young people into it, and provide Mussolini with the leadership necessary to carry out his policies ("Mussolini is alive; and he has a law and a mission in his life; but those who are not themselves alive do not understand that law and cannot, not even as the lowest of his followers, share that mission").

As significant as they may be, these demands for renewal are, for the purposes of our discussion, certainly less significant than the other demand that characterizes Pellizzi's entire analysis and constitutes its essence; namely, that of a politics inspired by the "positive and fertilizing principle" of freedom.

A politics based on love, on “everyone in agreement,” and on “embrassons-nous”—as Pellizzi asserted—has been and always would be nonsense; so too is a politics based on freedom. But a politics that explicitly contravenes the principle and spiritual force of love would not hold up; thus, a politics that runs counter to the spirit of freedom, in the final analysis, cannot lead to great and lasting results.

A statement—as can be seen—that is undoubtedly ambiguous in form (insofar as it sought to distinguish the spirit of freedom from freedom tout court), but unequivocal in substance, especially when viewed in light of what Pellizzi himself wrote in the Postilla alle lettere, namely, that “Fascism, in its very root, in its profound value, in its ultimate purpose, is expressed by the word freedom”.

While it is true that Pellizzi—perhaps frightened by the theoretical and political consequences his statement might have—sought in the remainder of his last article to resolve the problem of expressing the spirit of freedom within the framework of his corporatism; it is equally true that his historical explanation of the fascism-freedom identity—in terms of an individual reaction to the climate of unfreedom brought about in the postwar period by “red and other forms of disorder” and a collective reaction “to save the spontaneous historical personality of Italy and the Italians, threatened by tendencies and dogmas utterly alien to our consciousness and to our ancient yet ever-vibrant spiritual nature as a people”— —by historicizing the concept of freedom—effectively denied, at its very root, the possibility for fascism to create its own organic ruling class.

Even if we were to admit, in fact, that fascism managed to articulate a political agenda more in line with the aspirations of the younger generations, it is clear that, according to the logic of Pellizzi’s argument, these generations would always have opposed fascism with a “spirit of freedom” distinct from that of Mussolini’s fascism.

No matter how “vivid” Mussolini’s conception of fascism might have been, the central crux of the regime remained the need to “harmonize” the unity of the state with individual initiative, and this a priori ruled out the possibility for the “spirit of freedom” to truly come to fruition.

Hence, one of two things: either the younger generations would not be fascists, or their fascism would be something entirely different from what Mussolini sought to achieve—and in accordance with which the younger generations themselves were being educated; thus, in the end, the problem of freedom remained the regime’s true problem, the real obstacle preventing fascism from forming its own cohesive ruling class.

The “revisionist” solution to the “problem of the youth,” as can be seen, was therefore either not a solution at all or—if taken to its logical extremes—would sooner or later (meaning “after Mussolini”) lead out of fascism. It is therefore easy to understand the fierce determination with which the “intransigents” fought against it, both from a generational perspective (that is, due to the fear of many older people of being sacrificed for the sake of the young) and from the ideological-political perspective that concerns us most here.

For them, fascism had to be monolithic and totalitarian in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Nothing and no one was to escape its discipline and its organizational framework.

The “second thoughts of reason,” “intellectual remnants of the historical milieu against which Fascism had risen with its spiritualist reaction,” must not pollute the “Fascist movement.”

Those—the elderly and, above all, the young—who, yielding to their influence, “misinterpreted” the

word “revolution” and tended to let “Mussolini’s action”

“down the slippery slope of absolute naturalism and immanentism, leading straight to socialist nationalism or international Bolshevism,” were in fact counterrevolutionaries, disruptors of fascism, “in flagrant collusion with the enemies of its revolution.”

Hence the need to act against them with the utmost energy and intransigence:

“The misunderstanding that has been fostered within fascism for some time now,” he wrote, for example, in *Il Secolo fascista*, “must be promptly dispelled, since it is absurd to suppose that in a historical movement such as this, two disparate and opposing ideas could coexist, championed by men who speak entirely opposite languages, as if fascism could simultaneously be anti-fascism.”

In this situation, Mussolini never officially embraced the position of the “intransigents” and, in his public statements, indeed took particular pleasure in appearing open to the needs of young people; he displayed sympathy and support for “leading” youth groups and magazines, and on more than one occasion even used them to spark debates and opinion polls that were particularly close to his heart and that served to “gauge the mood” or lay the groundwork for some of his own initiatives.

In reality, however, his stance was one of substantial deafness and closed-mindedness toward any request for liberalization of the regime or even one aimed merely at securing the opportunity for the younger generations to freely express their fascism—their way of feeling fascist and of conceiving the evolution, the “march,” of fascism.

If one takes into account his skepticism toward people in general and Italians in particular, his fear of anything that might expose cracks and imperfections in the regime’s “monolithic” structure and cause scandal, and the disappointment he felt even toward the new generation of fascists, all of this suggests that for the Duce, the goal to be achieved was not—at least for the time being, still unattainable—a consensus based on genuine and conscious participation, but only—apparently easier to achieve and maintain—a consensus of an irrational, religious nature.

Consensus, to use the words of one of Mussolini’s favorite authors, Nietzsche, of the “believer”: faith. That faith which, to quote another author dear to the Duce, Le Bon, only great leaders—such as Mussolini was convinced he was—knew how to and were duty-bound to instill in people and which, once instilled, determined a specific way of feeling and acting across an entire generation.

That faith which, on the one hand, was “a necessity born of weakness” and, on the other, made the “believer” a man who “does not belong to himself,” who “can be nothing but a means, must be used, needs someone to use him”—a man whose instinct “pays the highest homage to a morality of sacrifice.”

In light of what we have said, it is certainly no surprise that Mussolini eventually came to be convinced, by the mid-1930s, of the need to extend the regime’s control ever further over all aspects of

Italian public life—and, in particular, over those related to young people's participation in it—to the point of making it one of the essential components of his conception of the "totalitarian state."

In January 1930—as we have seen—he had spoken of the "totalitarian principle of youth education." In the years that followed, the meaning of this expression became increasingly clear, both in its "ideological" content (an important step in this regard was the publication of The Doctrine of Fascism) and in its concrete political implementation.

The regime was to control, organize, and "shape" all youth; the foundation of young people's education was to be a single, well-defined doctrine of Fascism, to which the entire behavior of the new generations was to conform in every manifestation of their participation in the collective life of the regime.

In Mussolini's vision, in fact, the entire life of a fascist—from age six to sixty—was to be lived collectively and in service of the higher and more essential life of the State.

A typical example of this can be found in Ludwig's *Colloqui*:

We strive for this: to make Italy not exactly an imitation of ancient Prussia, but a people just as strongly disciplined. We have a synthetic, not an analytical, concept of the nation. Those who march do not diminish themselves… but multiply through all those who march with them.

We are, as in Russia, characterized by a collective sense of life, and this is what we wish to reinforce as the foundation of individual existence. With this, we do not go so far as to reduce people to mere numbers, but we consider them above all in terms of their function within the state. This is a major development in the psychology of nations, since it is being carried out by a Mediterranean people, who were once considered unsuited to such a thing. There, in collective life, lies the new appeal. Was it perhaps any different in ancient Rome?

During the Republic, the citizen had nothing but the life of the state, and with the emperors—under whom this changed—decadence indeed set in. Yes, this is what Fascism aims to do with the masses: organize a collective life, a shared life, working and fighting within a hierarchy without a herd mentality. We want the humanity and beauty of life in community… A person is taken from the bosom of the family as early as age six and returned by the state at age sixty. The person sees nothing—believe me—but is multiplied.

Thanks to this collective life and this absolute integration of all Italians into the State, the regime could have achieved that unity of purpose, that discipline, that common faith—which alone would have allowed it to turn Italians, and above all young people, into "believers," and thus to achieve its full

realization and project itself into the future.

Only by creating a religious atmosphere around itself—a “supreme idealistic tension”—could Fascism truly come to fruition.

In this regard, the words with which Mussolini concluded his speech to the National Council of Corporations on November 14, 1933, are highly significant:

To achieve full, complete, integral, and revolutionary corporatism, three conditions are necessary.

A single party through which, alongside economic discipline, political discipline also comes into play, and where, above conflicting interests, there is a vision that unites everyone in a common faith.

That is not enough. In addition to the single party, we need a totalitarian state—that is, a state that absorbs everything into itself, transforming and strengthening all the energy, all the interests, and all the hopes of a people.

That is still not enough. The third, final, and most important condition: there must be a period of extremely high ideological tension.

It is within this context—of Mussolini’s gradual realization of the failure of his efforts to create a new, truly fascist ruling class, and of his attempt to remedy this by bringing the entire country under the “totalitarian state” and mobilizing the whole of it (especially the youth) toward an irrational and “religious” mass consensus in support of the regime and its Duce—that, in our view, must be seen, in general terms, as the beginning of fascism’s shift toward Staracism in the first half of the 1930s and, in particular, as a whole series of political and bureaucratic-organizational initiatives and events that would otherwise be difficult to logically connect with one another.

A typical example in this regard is the crisis of 1931 that pitted Fascism against the Church over the issue of Catholic Action.

There were undoubtedly many reasons at the root of this crisis; some of which were deeply rooted in the past and had not been entirely eliminated by the Conciliation; others that were linked to the conflict that had arisen immediately after the signing of the Lateran Pacts and which its resolution had left essentially unresolved; and still others that found their origin in even more recent events and, in particular, in the turn that relations between Fascism and the Church had taken over the past two years.

Among the factors that most influenced Mussolini, the disappointment he felt upon realizing that these relations had indeed improved—but not as much as he had expected—certainly played a significant role.

Having conceived the entire "Conciliation" initiative in exclusively political terms and in the conviction that he could thereby bind the Church to himself and make it a cornerstone of his power, the Duce found it hard to bear the realization that the Holy See was, on the contrary, anything but willing to unconditionally share and support his policies, both in Italy and, above all, abroad.

The diplomatic records concerning relations with the Holy See in 1930–31 speak for themselves. They clearly show that, on the Italian side, considerable disappointment and irritation arose from the realization that, despite the Conciliation, a number of clergymen and even some bishops continued to maintain an "unfriendly" attitude toward Fascism, of "misunderstanding," and even hostile; and, above all—that the Holy See—while on the one hand making constant demands of the Italian government on domestic matters—systematically refused to adopt an attitude on the international stage consistent with that of Fascism, to the point of giving the impression of wanting to distance itself from it.

It is certainly not without significance that, when the crisis reached a fever pitch, the Italian side repeatedly held specific incidents against the Holy See, such as its failure to condemn the stance taken the previous year by the Bishop of Zagreb and numerous Yugoslav clergy in response to the repressive measures and trials against the Slavic irredentists in Venezia Giulia—and, more generally, the fact that the Holy See "in all countries governed by social democratic regimes supports the governments and thus opposes political currents that are, to a greater or lesser extent, close to fascism," and in particular seemed to put more energy into protesting to the Italian government than to the Spanish one, even though the violence suffered by those Catholics was far more severe than that suffered by certain Italian Catholic organizations.

All these factors, however, played only a secondary, collateral role in bringing about the crisis.

The primary cause of the crisis lies in the conflict arising from Mussolini's and fascism's determination to prevent, at all costs, the regime from losing control over the moral and political education of a segment of the younger generation—and, consequently, its influence over the future ruling class.

As we have already seen in the previous volume, one of the issues that had most complicated the negotiations for the Conciliation—and which had resurfaced in the controversies immediately following February 11, 1929—was that of Catholic youth organizations.

At that time, Mussolini had succeeded in eliminating the competition from the Catholic Scouts within the ONB, but he had been forced to accept and explicitly recognize the existence of Catholic Action and—what was even more serious for him—the Italian Catholic Youth.

Thanks to this explicit recognition, Catholic organizations—and especially the youth groups—had experienced a significant resurgence after the Conciliation, aided by the great care that the Church, and Pius XI in particular, had devoted to them, since they saw in these organizations the most effective means of countering Mussolini's plans to fascistize all of Italian society and confine Catholicism to the increasingly narrow sphere of mere religious education and worship and, in the long term, to form its own ruling class that could, in due course, take up the political and social mantle from fascism.

On the eve of the crisis, the Fascists estimated that Catholic organizations as a whole had about one

million members and reached approximately 100,000 readers through their daily newspapers, while the parish press was often the only reading material available to a large portion of the rest of the population.

As for the Catholic Youth Movement, official data released at the end of the 1930s documented a steady increase in membership and remarkable vitality, which was also expressed through a series of cultural, recreational, and athletic initiatives. This, however, had provoked discontent, suspicion, and concern among the Fascists and within the government authorities themselves, which immediately translated into close surveillance and a series of measures—sometimes openly repressive (seizures of individual issues of newspapers and bulletins, intimidation of local Catholic leaders or young members of Catholic organizations, etc.)— which, since the end of 1929, had in turn provoked discontent among Catholics as well as official protests from bishops (for example, in January 1930 by Cardinal Schuster, Archbishop of Milan) and from the Secretariat of State itself, and even a public reference by the Pope (on December 24, 1929, during the presentation of Christmas greetings by the Sacred College).

In this initial phase, although Mussolini made no secret of his discontent (especially regarding the encroachment of Catholic youth organizations into the realm of sports), the situation had not yet become too tense, and Augusto Turati, during an audience granted to him on February 6, 1930, was able to discuss the matter personally with Pius XI in fairly calm and relaxed terms: Each man had stood his ground, but nothing foreshadowed the crisis that would erupt a year later.

The crisis arose as a result of three events—two domestic and one international—that took shape or occurred during 1930 and the early months of 1931.

The first and most important of these was the increasingly clear emergence within Catholic Action and its affiliated organizations of a tendency that—partly as a reaction to the fascist attitude, partly riding the wave of successes achieved and driven by the need not to dampen or disperse—through a weak stance and reduced activity—the energy and enthusiasm of the young people who had joined and who could still be drawn into the ranks of Catholic associations, partly due to the influence of many former Popular Party members present in the central and local governing bodies of these associations, partly due to the influence exerted by the uncompromising stance of Pius XI and certain cardinals and clergy close to him regarding the education of youth and the assertion of Christian values in opposition to those espoused by fascism—it aimed, on the one hand, to increasingly expand the scope of Catholic involvement, as such, in Italian civil and social life; on the other hand, to give this involvement an increasingly uncompromising character—and not infrequently, whether consciously or not, even anti-fascist or, at the very least, highly critical of fascism; and, yet again, to circumvent, so to speak, the ban established by the Concordat on their involvement in politics, by distinguishing between active, party-based politics and politics in an absolute and philosophical sense: if—as Monsignor G. Pizzardo, general assistant of Catholic Action and an influential member of the Secretariat of State, in a report delivered in 1930 at the Study Week for Diocesan Ecclesiastical Assistants—politics, in the absolute sense, was the art of achieving the common good, since this could only be achieved through laws and institutions conforming to Christian principles and, in this sense, was indistinguishable from ethics and the Christian precept of charity, then it was clear that Catholic Action had to engage in politics.

Within this overall framework lay initiatives and stances that the regime certainly could not tolerate and that even in some ecclesiastical circles did not fail to raise concerns or prompt statements that were at once warnings, advice to exercise prudence, and clarifications aimed at reassuring the government and distancing themselves from the most overt and radical positions.

Among the former, we must at least mention the establishment by Catholic Action of professional sections and groups, and the gradual emergence within Catholic Youth—and especially within the university organization—of the tendency to consider dual membership in the FUCI and the GUF de facto incompatible. Among the latter, it is worth noting—due to their symbolic significance—the "Passo di corsa" column in *Avvenire d'Italia* on August 3, 1930, which urged Catholic Action to feel the fervor "to invade, to explore, to assert itself," and the one that in June—during a conference of the Superior Councils of Catholic Action organizations held in Rome—had argued, while discussing the newly established professional sections, the need to "exert influence so that the orientation of the nation's social life corresponds to Catholic doctrine"; this latter statement, in the particular climate of the moment—characterized by a whole series of Catholic initiatives aimed at celebrating the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum* in enthusiastic terms—clearly constituted a critique of Fascist corporatism, and which, probably, justifies the assessment given of it in a lengthy confidential report on the situation within Catholic Action by an authoritative police informant: a manifestation of "suppressed anti-fascism," which revealed a plan to gradually undermine the regime's structures "so that, with its inevitable collapse, the desired regime would emerge."

The second event—in itself far less significant, but one that took on importance and meaning when linked to the first—which led to the crisis was the emergence in 1930—as we have already mentioned—of the National Alliance on the Italian political scene, with its anti-fascist propaganda rooted in monarchist-Catholic ideology, and the discovery of the ties between its promoters and Father Rosa (who, not coincidentally, during the most tense days of the crisis would be threatened with death on several occasions, so much so that, as a precaution, he was sent on a trip to Spain).

Faced with such a development—which even prompted *Avanti!* to speak of the existence of a "conservative Catholic group" among the anti-fascist forces— it is clear that Mussolini could not help but address the root of the problem before it spread further and could exploit the severe hardship and economic crisis afflicting the country—and especially the countryside, where, moreover, the Church's influence was greater.

This was all the more true—and this brings us to the third factor that sparked the crisis of '31—because by then the Duce was becoming convinced, in light of developments in Spain's domestic situation and the stance taken by that country's clergy and Catholics toward them, that he had miscalculated regarding the Church.

The Conciliation had been and remained for him a major and largely positive political development; two years after it, however, it was now clear that the Church was by no means willing to merge with the regime or to support it unconditionally: it was prepared to do so only as long as it deemed it useful to itself, without, however, renouncing its own role in the process, and seeking to progressively expand its influence over Italy's civil and social life through an ever-wider and more assertive Catholic presence in the country—a presence always ready to promote its own assertiveness even at the political level, alongside Fascism and, better yet, in place of Fascism.

On the other hand, events in Spain demonstrated in turn (and Mussolini became increasingly convinced of this with each passing day—a conviction he would see confirmed in April 1931, when the republic was proclaimed) at least two things: that Catholic education and the stance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were no longer able to determine the political behavior of a Catholic country, and that quite a few Catholics—including organized groups—and even some segments of the clergy were acting politically independently of the Church's position, imbuing their commitment with democratic values and, in doing so, also influencing the clergy's attitude.

The Aphorisms he wrote after Alfonso XIII's departure from Spain are extremely significant, just as it is significant that during the weeks of the crisis, the fascist press repeatedly focused on the Spanish situation to emphasize how Spanish Catholics had not attempted "any kind of resistance" and that Catholic Action in Spain had not "lifted a finger, when energetic action—even to the point of sacrifice and heroism—on the part of the volunteer members of Catholic Action would have been most necessary and urgent."

Given these circumstances, it is clear that for the Duce, the reasons to reconsider his policy toward the Church were becoming even more numerous and pressing.

Aside from the discontent simmering within the fascist ranks—where an increasing number of people were beginning to believe that Mussolini had made too many concessions to the "priests," thereby jeopardizing the further development of the fascist revolution—fascism could not allow the formation of a sort of covert and insidious Catholic opposition (it is no coincidence that at the height of the crisis, even government officials would refer in official documents to certain meetings of Catholic Action leaders as being of a "more than Masonic" nature), which was far more dangerous than outright anti-Fascist opposition, nor that, through the various Catholic organizations (which, moreover, were largely in the hands of former members of the Popular Party), a not insignificant portion of the youth be educated in principles different from—and often in conflict with—those of Fascism, principles that—even setting aside the political maneuvers that anti-Fascist Catholics might have devised around them—were, in the Duce's view, the most contrary to the affirmation of that *virtus* he sought to instill in the younger generations.

Had not Nietzsche himself written that the "most harmful vice" was Christianity, since it had given rise to a domesticated and sickly type of man and had "made an ideal out of opposition to the instincts of healthy life preservation"?

The first signs of the crisis emerged in the press and were led by the fascist corporatist and trade union press.

After an initial warning from *Critica fascista*, which—drawing on the Catholics' extensive discussion of *Rerum novarum*—challenged the Church's right to intervene in social life, *Il lavoro fascista* went on the offensive with a harsh article by its editor, Gherardo Casini, against the professional sections, which were accused of "encroaching on the realm of fascism's trade union and corporatist order."

This article was followed in the days that followed by others that were increasingly harsh against Catholic Action, explicitly accused of attempting to "train cadres who might one day replace the leadership of Fascism" and of using for this purpose "men whom a past that is now all too inglorious should have removed from the scene."

In support of these accusations, on March 31, *Il lavoro fascista* published a circular from the Roman federation of Catholic Youth in which member groups were urged to establish workers' secretariats.

Meanwhile, joining the trade union daily in its attacks were *La Tribuna* (which would soon accuse Catholic Action of being tainted by populism and of misunderstanding—if not outright hostility—toward the regime) and the youth weekly *Gioventù Fascista* (which launched a fierce polemic on the principles of youth education, during which it went so far as to claim that the Catholic side was striving

“to establish a full-fledged political party by channeling—or attempting to channel—a portion of Italian youth behind the old programs and the rotten remnants of the Sturzian world”).

At first, the Catholic side tried not to respond to these attacks. Even the government’s decision to ban two Catholic university conferences initially did not provoke any protests.

As recently as April 10, *L'Osservatore Romano* reported that two days earlier, the Central Council of Catholic Action had deemed the circular published by *Il Lavoro Fascista*

“inconsistent with the directives issued by the governing bodies of Catholic Action.”

And the very next day, it published the news of the resignation of the discredited president of the Roman federation.

As the attacks continued and multiplied, however, it was impossible to avoid entering into a polemic; all the more so since by then the Holy See could no longer harbor any doubts about Mussolini’s determination to carry on the press campaign and thereby foster a climate of hostility toward Catholic organizations, in order to compel them to accept a whole series of conditions he deemed necessary for placing relations between the regime and the Church on a new footing.

In a meeting with the nuncio, Monsignor Borgongini Duca, on April 8, the ambassador to the Holy See, De Vecchi—one of the Four—had in fact informed the Vatican representative of Mussolini’s demands; the most important concerned the Catholic press (which Mussolini demanded be “moderate”), Catholic Action (which the Church was to ensure “does not become, as it is becoming, a political party, but remains within the terms of the Concordat and abandons any trade-unionist provocation”), and the popular “leaders” (who were to be removed from Rome, starting with De Gasperi).

Since the Holy See rejected these demands, the controversy became extremely heated, directly involving the Pope himself, who personally intervened on several occasions.

Pius XI’s first intervention took place on April 19, during an audience granted to representatives of Roman Catholic organizations. It was an outright defense of the “legitimacy,” “necessity,” and “indispensability” of Catholic Action, as well as a reaffirmation of its right to intervene not only in “matters of individual and domestic morality” but also in those of “social morality.”

His second and most important statement was a letter sent on April 26 to Cardinal Schuster and published by the *Osservatore Romano*.

A week earlier, speaking in Milan, the secretary of the PNF, G. Giuriati, having stated that Fascism sought to “educate young people in the religion of their forefathers,” had taken issue with those Catholics who sought to assume the task of saving what had already been saved by Fascism and who invoked the Concordat for this purpose; To them, he had said, it must be recalled that “the Concordat was concluded by the Holy See with the totalitarian Fascist regime and with the Fascist corporative state.”

Pius XI’s letter was a response to these statements. Regarding the education of young people, the pope effectively accused fascism of corrupting youth by exposing them “to inspirations of hatred and irreverence, making the practice of religious duties difficult and almost impossible due to the simultaneous presence of entirely different activities, and permitting public women’s athletic

competitions, the improprieties and dangers of which even paganism recognized."

As for Catholic Action as a whole, he reiterated the view that it should "extend its reach to the working-class, occupational, and social spheres" so as to safeguard the welfare of souls everywhere.

The Fascist reaction to these positions taken by the pontiff was generally extremely violent. In some northern localities (in Turin, in Romagna, and especially in Parma), there were even a few demonstrations, most likely spontaneous: there were too many anticlericals within Fascism, and the media campaign of the preceding days had resonated too widely—especially among young people—for the pope's words not to provoke a reaction.

Two of the responses deserve our attention: the anonymous article "Supernatural and Natural" in *Il Tevere* on April 29 and Arnaldo Mussolini's editorial "The Divine and the Profane" in *Popolo d'Italia* on May 2.

Although seemingly different in tone—the first harsh, the second measured—and both focused more on the conciliatory rather than the intransigent elements in the Pope's words, these two articles in fact accurately reflect the Duce's position (to whom, we believe, the first article should be attributed or, at the very least, considered to have been directly inspired by him).

According to *Il Tevere*

"the focal point" of the Pope's letter was the recognition of the principle that the State acted within the natural and civil order and Catholic Action within the spiritual and supernatural order, as well as the affirmation that, if there had been any deviations, they had been disapproved of and corrected.

An agreement was therefore possible. It was sufficient that it be clear that "the State claims for itself, within its own totalitarian framework, everything that falls within the natural and civil order; that is, even control over what Catholic Action accomplishes in the natural and civil order to pursue its spiritual and supernatural ends"; once this was established, "rather than a matter of Catholic Action, we believe there is a matter of the men of Catholic Action"; "of men, not of principles."

A position, aside from the tone, not very different from that of the Duce's brother, for whom what mattered was that the respective spheres of influence be clearly established.

It is logical and natural that Mussolini did not want the disagreement to degenerate into open conflict. An open conflict could not benefit the regime in any way, and it would have damaged it even abroad, not to mention the danger that the situation might slip out of his control or, at the very least, might give new life and initiative to the intransigent wing of the party.

In this regard, the telegram he reportedly sent to all prefects on May 28 is telling:

Pending clarification of the situation between the Regime and Catholic Action, no incidents must occur, especially those of a nature that might offend the religious sentiments of the population. Notify party leadership at all levels.

With the cards now on the table, the time had come for him to engage in direct negotiations to reach an agreement based on the demands that had been transmitted to the Holy See on April 8. It was no coincidence that as soon as *L'Osservatore Romano*, on May 6, commented on Arnaldo Mussolini's editorial and stated its agreement to let "the supreme authorities speak and act—that is, negotiate—in whatever manner they deem appropriate," the media controversy subsided for about ten days.

On the diplomatic front, however, nothing happened during those ten days.

On May 16, *Il Lavoro Fascista* then signaled its intention to reignite the controversy.

In reality, however, the controversy did not erupt furiously again until the 21st, driven primarily by *L'Osservatore Romano*, which responded to the labor unions' daily newspaper and, above all, published a strange account of the special audience granted by the Pope to the leaders of the FUCI. At the same time, *La Tribuna* began publishing—a series of revelations that were continued and intensified in the following days by *Il Lavoro Fascista*— of a series of revelations (the authenticity of which sparked a furious controversy with the Vatican organ) regarding four meetings of the top leaders of Catholic Action that had taken place in Rome between May 12 and 17 and which, according to the two Fascist newspapers, irrefutably demonstrated Catholic Action's anti-Fascism and subversive activities.

At the same time, in various parts of Italy and in Rome itself, there were numerous incidents of violence against Catholic organizations and young Catholics, often accompanied by cries of "Down with the priests, the FUCI, and the Popular Party" and "Down with the Pope."

Finally, on May 29, after *Il Popolo di Roma* had reported on "open disagreements" that had arisen in the Vatican over "Catholic Action's anti-fascist stance," at 8:30 p.m. that evening, Mussolini sent a telegram to all prefects announcing the decision to dissolve and ban "youth associations of any kind and age group that are not directly affiliated with the organizations of the PNF or the ONB" and ordered them to immediately proceed with the closure of the relevant premises, the seizure of the materials contained therein, and the issuance of warnings to their leaders.

The order was carried out between the 30th and the 31st without any serious incidents.

Given the severity of the measure, the reactions were modest: many bishops—to whom the Holy See had promptly issued instructions to assume "the protection and leadership" of Catholic Action—protested, and the pope joined them, taking the opportunity of two public ceremonies at the Vatican to assert that a "ravage" was being wrought

"of that which is the well-known favorite of Our Heart and of the Heart of that God for whom we act as vicars."

More serious acts of violence and intimidation occurred shortly after the meeting of the PNF Directorate held in Rome, chaired by Mussolini, on June 3, during which an agenda was approved that, while reaffirming respect for the Catholic religion, declared Fascism's determination "not to tolerate

that, under any banner—old or new—the residual anti-Fascism that has thus far been spared should find refuge and protection."

To complete the picture of what we know about these events, it is also necessary to note that, following the first serious incidents of violence—and in particular those that occurred in Rome—on May 29 the nuncio had sent a strongly worded protest to the Italian government, concluding with a request for a "written response sufficient to reassure the Holy See within 24 hours of the delivery of this note."

At the same time, Ambassador De Vecchi was informed, "by order of the Holy Father," that he was "requested" to refrain from visiting the Cardinal Secretary of State.

The protest was harsh, and the reply was equally harsh: the very next day, Grandi had in fact informed the nuncio that the note was inadmissible "due to the unacceptable and offensive ultimatum contained therein": "The Italian government cannot accept peremptory terms from anyone."

Setting aside the formal, prestige-related aspects, however, Mussolini was ready to negotiate and reach an agreement, essentially without demanding from the Holy See anything it could not grant.

This is demonstrated by a note of his dated June 1, which was intended to serve as a basis for Grandi to initiate negotiations:

a) The Fascist regime wishes to live in peace—if possible—with all states, including the Vatican City State.

b) Of the Lateran Treaties as a whole, two have not given rise to any problems in their implementation —the Treaty itself and the monetary convention.

c) Regarding the Concordat—extremely important articles such as those on marriage and education (in addition to everything else) have been implemented without incident.

d) Only one article—Article 43—of the Concordat has given rise to and will continue to give rise to disputes: it is on this article, therefore, that ideas and practical positions must be clarified.

e) The Pope's decision to place the Catholic Action directly under the authority of the bishops may provide an opportunity for discussions, the aim of which should be a supplementary convention or agreement regarding the interpretation of Article 43.

f) In the meantime, media controversies should be suspended, and the Pontiff should refrain from reigniting them through remarks to his visitors.

g) The measures taken by the government to dissolve Catholic youth organizations were also necessary to prevent more serious incidents: on the whole, the incidents were not extensive, neither in terms of personal injury nor property damage; yet they were highly significant as they revealed a deep-seated and widespread sentiment opposed to any organization or involvement of the clergy in the nation's political and social life.

On closer inspection, the Holy See proved to be the more intransigent party.

In June, it embarked on a meticulous diplomatic dispute which—even taking into account the Pope's

likely irritation and the need to avoid starting future negotiations at a disadvantage—was certainly not the most appropriate path to reaching a compromise agreement.

Once contacts were reestablished, it declared itself willing to begin talks to clarify Article 43 of the Concordat—the one concerning Catholic Action—more precisely; in practice, however, it made it clear that it would wait first not so much to be reassured, but for an explicit condemnation of the recent events: knowing Mussolini, this was truly a somewhat excessive request; and immediately afterward, on June 28, she in turn deemed the latest Italian note inadmissible because it contained "the epithet 'more than Masonic' applied to the meetings of Catholic Action and the statement that also sounds like irony: that the Royal Government had rendered a service to the Church by dissolving these Catholic Action organizations."

That same day, Borgongini Duca wrote to De Vecchi that in the government's latest public statements, "the Holy Father could not help but see… almost a preparation of the groundwork and shaping of public opinion in view of possible negotiations, and he intends to take some action himself along the same lines. He wished, however, to act preemptively, so that it would not come as a surprise."

It was the announcement of the imminent publication (which took place on July 5, though dated June 29) of the encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno*. Divided into two parts, the first part of the encyclical sought to refute the arguments put forward by fascism against Catholic Action and to justify the dissolution of youth organizations; in the second part, the discussion focused primarily on the "essential" issue of the education of youth.

The Church could not, in fact, but reject the plan—already largely carried out—to completely monopolize youth, from the very earliest childhood through adulthood, for the exclusive glory of a party or a regime, based on an ideology that openly amounts to a veritable pagan statolatry, which stands in no less stark contrast to the natural rights of the family than to the supernatural rights of the Church, preventing youth from turning to Jesus Christ—since this is tantamount to preventing them from turning to the Church, for where the Church is, there is Jesus Christ—and without the Church, schools and such associations would inevitably and swiftly, by fatal logical and psychological necessity, become pagan institutions; necessary, therefore, but not sufficient—for with that religious instruction and that ecclesiastical assistance, the Church of Jesus Christ can exercise only a minimum of its spiritual and supernatural efficacy, and this in a setting and environment not under its control, preoccupied with many other subjects of instruction and entirely different activities, subject to immediate authorities who are often uncooperative or even hostile and who not infrequently exert contrary influences through their words and the example of their lives…

The conception of the State, which claims the new generations as its own—entirely and without exception, from early childhood to adulthood—is, for a Catholic, irreconcilable with the natural right of the family. It is not reconcilable for a Catholic with Catholic doctrine to claim that the Church and the Pope must limit themselves to religious practices (Mass and the sacraments) and that the rest of education belongs entirely to the State… We might say that one is Catholic only in name and by baptism, contrary to the demands of that name and to the very baptismal commitments themselves, by adopting and carrying out a program whose doctrines and principles are so contrary to the rights of the Church of Jesus Christ and of souls that it misrepresents, combats, and persecutes Catholic Action—which is to say, what the Church and its Head are known to hold most dear and precious.

This central part of the pontiff's address was followed by a condemnation of the wording of the Fascist oath, in that it required the execution of orders that could even amount to "the violation of the rights of the Church and of souls" and the service of "a revolution that tears the youth away from the Church and from Jesus Christ and that educates its young forces in hatred, violence, and irreverence, not excluding the person of the Pope himself":

Aware of the many difficulties of the present time and knowing that for so many, membership and the oath are a prerequisite for career advancement, for sustenance, and for life itself, we have sought a means to restore peace of mind to consciences while minimizing external difficulties as much as possible.

And it seems to us that such a means for young members might be for them to make the following reservation before God and their own conscience: "subject to the will of God and the Church" or "subject to the duties of a good Christian," with the firm resolve to declare such a reservation publicly as well, should the need arise.

And where these directives and orders originate, we would like our prayer to reach, the prayer of a Father who wishes to care for the consciences of his many children in Jesus Christ—namely, that this same reservation be included in the form of the oath, unless one wishes to do better, much better, namely, to omit the oath altogether, which is in itself an act of religion and certainly does not belong in the most appropriate place on a party membership card.

Finally, the encyclical concluded with this clarification:

… with all that We have said thus far, We have not intended to condemn the party and the regime as such. We have intended to point out and condemn whatever, in their program and actions, We have seen and found to be contrary to Catholic doctrine and practice and therefore irreconcilable with the name and profession of Catholics.

This final passage of the encyclical—an outstretched hand, as Jemolo wrote, toward the regime—and the fact, as mentioned, that on June 28 Pius XI had informed Mussolini that he intended to do "something" to "shape public opinion in view of possible negotiations," suggest that the intransigence displayed by the Holy See and the papal encyclical "Non abbiamo bisogno" itself were essentially

intended to dramatize the situation, make it clear to Mussolini that he could not count on the Church's acquiescence, and psychologically rally Italian and foreign Catholics around the Pope in order to create difficulties for fascism both at home and abroad.

This explanation is probably the most plausible. From this perspective, the fact that an agreement was reached in early September—which, while apparently resolving the crisis without winners or losers, was in reality a success for Mussolini—can only have one explanation: that the encyclical failed to truly mobilize Catholics against the regime and, indeed, achieved, if anything, a counterproductive result: it gave the impression of an initiative that disrupted the Italian situation at a time that was, moreover, already so grave, and thus only played into the hands of fascism's enemies; so that, on the one hand, it cemented the fascists' loyalty to Mussolini; on the other hand, it was poorly received by sympathizers and more or less secular anti-fascists, who saw it as undue clerical interference in Italian life; and, on yet another hand, it paralyzed Catholics, disrupting the balance of their consciences that had been established through the Conciliation, to the substantial benefit of its moderate-nationalist wing.

In this regard, the reports that Mussolini immediately requested from the prefects regarding the public's reactions to the encyclical are telling.

These reports show, in fact, that, in general, the encyclical was received with considerable perplexity and, on the whole, unfavorably, and that not even a portion of the clergy was immune to this sentiment: what the vast majority of Catholics feared most was a rift between the regime and the Church, and they therefore hoped for a resolution to the crisis.

To this explanation—whose logical premise is that the crisis of '31 was essentially brought about by Mussolini—one could, hypothetically, another explanation could be added, one for which there is also some evidence and which, if accepted, would lead one to believe that the crisis of '31 was not caused solely by Mussolini's will, but that this will, to some extent, coincided with and was compounded by a similar sentiment that had developed within Catholic circles.

The main elements supporting this hypothesis are:

1. the impression that there was some truth to the Fascist accusations regarding the anti-Fascist nature of the meetings of Catholic Action leaders held May 12–17;

2. the fact that in May there were those in the Vatican who considered the Fascist regime to be in grave difficulty, perhaps even in danger; aside from other sporadic references in informants' reports, this is evident above all from the account that De Vecchi wrote for Grandi regarding his June 9 meeting with the Secretary of State, Cardinal E. Pacelli, and with Nuncio Borgongini Duca; in it, we read:

The Cardinal… then made a point of responding to an observation I had made in recent days to the various people through whom I have never allowed my contacts to be lost or to wane: namely, that he had led me to understand that he believed Fascism was severely compromised and nearing the end of its mission in government.

He explained that, in fact, on Friday, May 22, he had asked me more than once whether the government was confident in itself and felt strong, receiving from me the answer he had received, but that he had posed such a question simply to let me know that rumors of danger were circulating here and there.

In response to this explanation, I immediately pointed out that I, too, had noticed similar questions; but not so much to complain about them as to note that they provided further confirmation—quite authoritative, though not strictly necessary—of the misguided delusion and fundamentally flawed connections of various leaders within Catholic Action, who, in those days, were singing the "Miserere" to Fascism.

Moreover, the questions posed by the Most Eminent Cardinal were not the only official confirmation of such a delusional state of mind among the enemies of the Regime lurking within Catholic Action. Another highly significant and unequivocal piece of evidence regarding such deplorable rumors of their origin had previously been provided to me by the document that Monsignor Borgongini had read to me some time ago on the orders of the Holy Father, declaring its August and Apostolic authorship.

That document—which the Cardinal could reread whenever he wished—reads verbatim as follows: "Fascism has already lost a great deal and is losing more every day. Listen to this advice we give you as friends." Faced with such evidence, the Cardinal merely added with a smile: "But the advice was given to you by friends!"—"Certainly," he replied, "but that made it all the more necessary to take measures against those who provided information that prompted the Holy Father's friendly advice and the no less friendly inquiries from the Cardinal Secretary of State."

3. the existence within the Vatican and within the Sacred College itself of a tendency that was certainly more extreme than a more moderate one; aside from the revelations in *Il Popolo di Roma* and the information gleaned from De Vecchi's aforementioned report to Grandi dated June 9 (in which it is stated that Cardinals Pacelli and Gasparri were far more moderate than the nuncio and the Vicar of Rome, Cardinal Marchetti, and were keen to point this out), it is significant in this regard that this is also evident from the study dedicated to the crisis of '31 by Father A. Martini.

In light of these elements, the hypothesis that the crisis of '31 was not caused solely by Mussolini's will (even if it was certainly this that set the mechanism in motion) but also by a misjudgment on the part of certain Vatican circles and some Catholic leaders regarding Mussolini's and the regime's actual ability to face and overcome a showdown with the Church does not seem to us to be one that should be ruled out a priori.

All the more so because this hypothesis has the advantage of providing a logical explanation for the Church's modus operandi at certain moments during the crisis itself—an explanation that, by contrast, proves difficult if one assumes that the crisis was desired solely by Mussolini and that the Holy See

limited itself to defending Catholic organizations.

The concerns and limited support the encyclical generated among Catholics, together with Mussolini's desire to bring the matter to a close, almost certainly explain the relative brevity of the controversies sparked by its publication (by August, they had already begun to fade) and the tone, which was essentially less heated than in previous instances.

After the initial violent reaction—during which there were attempts to link the Church's stance to alleged maneuvers by Don Sturzo from France and to raise the possibility of denouncing the Concordat—the Fascist press focused primarily on defending and extolling the ONB and its role: "the youthful fabric capable of smoothing out the wrinkles of old, provincial, and factional Italy," as Arnaldo Mussolini defined it.

As for Mussolini and fascism, two major initiatives were taken: the revocation of the compatibility between membership in Catholic Action and the National Fascist Party (PNF), announced by the press on July 10, and the approval on July 14 by the party's Directorate of three highly impassioned but essentially insignificant statements, one protesting the encyclical's assertion that the Fascist oath was often taken opportunistically, another claiming that the Vatican and Freemasonry were linked by their shared hostility toward the Fascist state, and the third in defense of the ONB, "the strength, pride, and certainty of the Fascist regime."

The first fifteen days following the publication of the encyclical thus passed in a tense atmosphere, in which the two sides sized each other up and simultaneously defined their respective stances toward their own most extremist factions.

It was during this period that the most serious and alarming rumors and hypotheses began to circulate—partly deliberately, partly as a reflection of the various positions and, consequently, of their intentions and fears.

On the Fascist side, however, the situation can be said to have become completely clear with the meeting of the Directorate on July 1.

According to the documentation that has come down to us, it appears that Mussolini intended, right up to the last moment, to give the Pope a very harsh and threatening response.

Two events must have contributed significantly to his change of heart: a heartfelt note sent to him by Cardinal Gasparri, in which the Cardinal of Conciliation, urging him not to take "decisions that might aggravate the political-religious situation in Italy, already so grave and painful for everyone," indirectly suggesting that an agreement with the Holy See was far from impossible; and the stance of numerous members of the Directorate, who were opposed to further escalating the conflict.

This is the only way to explain the essentially innocuous political tone of the statements approved by the Directorate and, above all, their stark contrast to the three that Mussolini had initially drafted himself and brought up for discussion before the Directorate itself.

Of these statements, one in particular was extremely harsh—the "Appeal to the Clergy," which clearly sought to pit the clergy against the pope:

The Directorate of the P.N.F.—the true voice of the sentiments of millions of Italians—appeals to the bishops, priests, parish priests, members of religious orders, and all those who feel Italian, who have refused to confuse the sacred with the profane, nor to inherit the old grudges and outdated ideologies of the Popular Party, which became Catholic Action—because they realize the extreme gravity of what has happened with the recent, veritable "appeal to foreigners" against Fascist Italy, an appeal that fell on deaf ears since today Italy, a world power, can smile at such medieval-style attempts; appeals—however—that have deeply troubled the people and the Italian clergy itself.

Men belonging to the clergy, from the highest to the lowest ranks of the hierarchy, the Directorate of the P.N.F. urgently invites you to reflect on this alternative: the Fascist sincerely desires peace but does not fear war. When war breaks out, he pursues it to the end with indomitable energy, and he has proven this.

As for the Holy See, the decision to enter into negotiations was made on July 23, during a meeting of the Sacred College in which the majority of the cardinals sided precisely for the initiation of "serious negotiations, conducted by skilled negotiators," and—we might add—negotiators not considered hostile to Fascism at Palazzo Venezia.

Once again, the choice fell on Father Tacchi-Venturi: summoned the following day by Pius XI and having received instructions from him, the Jesuit met with Mussolini that very same day and read him a message from the pontiff.

The tone of the message was harsh and threatening: until then, the pope had refrained from formal condemnations; however, recent events and the most authoritative and official commentaries on the encyclical had unfortunately convinced him of what, until shortly before, had not yet seemed to him to be proven with certainty; therefore, he "finds himself placed (though not of his own making) in a moral necessity—that is, in the precise duty before Catholics throughout the world—to explicitly condemn principles that are in conflict with the doctrine and the rights of the Church."

It was certainly a strange way to begin negotiations, but Mussolini played along: if the pope wanted to "save face," let him do so; the important thing was to negotiate and, for the moment, not to appear any less intransigent and threatening than the pope.

Tacchi-Venturi's report reads:

As soon as I had finished, the Honorable Mussolini, who had listened attentively to the entire account without the slightest interruption and without losing his composure in the least, yet appearing as if struck by an unexpected and most disastrous announcement, and with the countenance and words of a man grieved by the foreboding of an imminent and extreme evil, began to give vent to the deep and varied emotions that the threatened papal condemnation had stirred in his stunned soul.

He said it seemed almost as if he were dreaming, hearing this—which he had also happened to hear at such a tragic moment for the fate of all of Europe, indeed of the entire world—when Bolshevism was knocking at Germany's gates, when hunger, that worst of advisors, foreshadowed terrible upheavals in the social order, and anticlericalism, linked to Masonic sects, should have been promoting harmony and unity between the two powers—ecclesiastical and civil—yet the formulation and implementation of proposals such as those in the message, instead of stemming so many imminent evils, were breaking the dams and unleashing upon Italy and the world the barely restrained violence of Bolshevism and anticlericalism.

He could not guarantee whether he would be able to prevent or contain the most barbaric reprisals and ensure the maintenance of public order.

He therefore urged the Father to take into account the extreme gravity of the situation in a country from which an immense accumulation of damage for all of Italy was surely to be expected. This, if His Holiness would consider it, amounted to a veritable declaration of war; often the losses of the victors are balanced by those of the vanquished—and finally, it would seem prudent not to forget that even if war were desired at any cost, he, Mussolini, would be able to show the whole world that he knew how to wage war.

Having broached the subject in this unusual manner, the two then began to talk… about peace. Tacchi-Venturi presented his own proposal for a programmatic declaration, and Mussolini accepted it. Negotiations began in earnest the following day. They were not always easy, but neither were they ever truly difficult.

An agreement was reached after eleven meetings.

About halfway through the negotiations, the Holy See requested a preliminary concession: that "the premises, insignia, records, and everything else still in the hands of the Public Security Authorities" that had previously belonged to the dissolved Catholic youth organizations be handed over to the bishops.

Mussolini accepted the request, but on the condition that the matter remain secret and that the bishops make no use whatsoever of what was handed over to them until further notice…

The agreement was signed on September 2 and immediately made public. It was worded as follows:

Following discussions between the Holy See and the Italian Government concerning the dissolution of the youth groups affiliated with Italian Catholic Action, and regarding the activities of that organization in general, an agreement has been reached on the following terms:

1. Italian Catholic Action is essentially diocesan in nature and reports directly to the bishops, who appoint its ecclesiastical and lay leaders. Those who belonged to parties opposed to the regime may not be appointed as leaders. In accordance with its religious and supernatural purposes, Catholic Action does not concern itself with politics in any way, and in its external organizational forms, it refrains from everything that is characteristic of and traditional to political parties. The flag of the local Catholic Action associations will be the national flag.

2. Catholic Action does not include in its program the establishment of professional associations or trade unions; it therefore does not undertake tasks of a trade-union nature. Its existing internal professional sections, as provided for by the law of April 3, 1926, are formed for exclusively spiritual and religious purposes and also aim to help ensure that the legally recognized labor union increasingly adheres to the principles of collaboration among social classes and to the social and national goals that, in a Catholic country, the State—under the current legal system—seeks to achieve.

3. The Youth Clubs affiliated with Catholic Action shall be called Catholic Action Associations. These Associations may have membership cards and badges strictly corresponding to their religious purpose, and the various Associations shall have no other flag besides the national flag and their own religious banners.

Local associations shall refrain from engaging in any athletic or sporting activities, limiting themselves solely to recreational and educational activities with religious purposes.

For Mussolini, the agreement was undoubtedly a success. Pius XI had been forced to completely abandon his reservations regarding the fascist oath, even though these had been so prominently emphasized in his encyclical. The agreement made no mention of them whatsoever.

As for Catholic Action, it emerged from the agreement scaled back to the diocesan level; in other words, it lost—at least legally—its unity and was placed under the guidance of clergy who, for better or worse, held a variety of positions toward the regime. As for its leaders, the explicit prohibition against selecting them from among those who had belonged to “parties opposed to the Regime” eliminated all former members of the Popular Party and, with them—at least for the time being—almost all of the most politically active, capable, and committed members. It was also prohibited from engaging in any trade union-type activities; while the “internal professional sections” were spared, the agreement

nevertheless imposed very specific limits on their activities and, more importantly, bound them to the principles and aims of the current state order—that is, it made it very difficult and risky for them to attempt to pit Catholic corporatism against Fascist corporatism.

The Catholic youth organizations suppressed at the end of May were reconstituted under a different name; however, they were deprived of the ability to engage in any athletic or sporting activities (that is, they were stripped of any possibility of competing with the ONB in an area that was certainly not secondary in terms of attracting young people) and were confined to recreational and educational activities "with religious purposes."

This situation, on the one hand, was far more regressive than the one prior to the crisis—especially given the trends toward expanding their activities that had emerged in recent years—and, on the other hand, made them far less appealing to young people and easier for the regime to control.

According to a Fascist informant in Paris who had managed to learn of Don Sturzo's initial reactions to the September 2 agreement, even for the former leader of the People's Party, Mussolini had emerged victorious.

In fact, his report states:

Don Sturzo showed no surprise at the reconciliation between Fascism and the Vatican, because he had always believed that they would eventually find a way to reach an understanding, since neither of the two contenders had any interest in pushing things to the limit. It would have taken a Gregory the Great, he says, who would have truly acted in the Church's best interest by confronting the current struggle and damage, yet confident of securing the final triumph of its cause.

Since Sturzo openly thinks and says that the current agreement represents a complete triumph of the Fascist State over the Church—which has lowered its banner in a manner all the more evident and shameful because it had been raised with singular pride and vehemence to proclaim the inviolability of its youth—

He says that the Pope has allowed himself to be outmaneuvered a second time: the first time when he listened too superficially to the reports that prompted him to initiate hostilities; he did not then fully grasp the true ultimate scope of the movements taking shape within Catholic Action; and now, having decisively set out on this path of asserting his authority, he failed to press the issue further and erred by confining to the Italian context an issue that had become international and that the Catholic world had accepted as such.

Now the Pope can cry out all he wants if further troubles arise with Fascism—it has become a case of "cry wolf"—they will let him cry out, but the support of Catholics will no longer be what it once was. In short, he has discredited himself, and this is because he listened too much to the advisers of the

ancien régime, who persuaded the Pope—as Don Sturzo says—that with his attitude he was playing into the hands of Freemasonry and democracy; and he deplores as tactless and politically unwise everything that was published, done, and said by these movements at the time of the break.

According to Don Sturzo, having so strongly emphasized his joy over the conflict that had broken out during that period greatly contributed to persuading the Pope that, by antagonizing Fascism, he was playing into the hands of his other adversaries—Freemasonry and democracy.

In summary, Don Sturzo's view is that this reconciliation clearly represents a success for Mussolini, and he took the opportunity to reiterate to his friends what he has always told and maintained: namely, that they are deluding themselves when they attribute to Fascism a (constantly renewing) lifespan of only a few more months.

Fascism, Don Sturzo confirms, will have a long life ahead of it, even if something were to happen to Mussolini, because it has become too deeply ingrained in every aspect of the nation's life, and too many interests have been built up around it. One has to wonder, he adds, who would have the guts to take over in the face of the looming economic disaster, leading him to conclude that it is best to wait and see how events unfold and let Fascism fend for itself amid the immense difficulties into which it has played a major role in plunging Italy.

A completely different assessment, of course, was offered by Vatican circles.

For *Civiltà Cattolica*, in particular, the agreement, on the one hand, demonstrated the groundlessness of the accusations of political meddling that had been leveled against Catholic Action (and thus against the Church) and, on the other hand, affirmed the Pope's firm resolve to prevent any interference with or harm to Catholic Action and the associations under its umbrella.

Indeed, the Pope could never have accepted a situation that contradicted what he had "always so strongly proclaimed, asserted, and defended."

In fact, it seems historically indisputable to us that the agreement constituted a defeat for the Church at that time. Ultimately, even the most authoritative Catholic historiography shares this view. For Scoppola, for example, the September agreements marked, on the whole, a certain retreat in Catholic Action's stance toward the regime: Catholic Action's exclusively religious and spiritual mission seemed to be reaffirmed in ways that limited or even compromised the possibility of effective cultural education on political and social issues.

On the other hand, the professional sections of Catholic Action committed themselves to promoting the social and national policies of the fascist state.

This apolitical stance once again amounted to the exclusion of any action contrary to the existing regime and instead implied support for it on the part of religious organizations.

Likewise, there is no doubt that with the crisis of 1931, the hopes of those within the Church who had thought they could “Catholicize” fascism and use it to restore the state and society in a Catholic sense were dashed.

However, the agreement must also be viewed and evaluated from a broader perspective—namely, that of its long-term repercussions and developments on Italian Catholics and the Church in their relations with the regime.

Officially, after the agreement of September 2, relations between the Vatican and Palazzo Venezia remained excellent for several years—roughly until 1938 (when they deteriorated again due to the resurgence of the Catholic Action issue and the emergence of the race issue).

The seal—which was meant to show the world that the crisis was now buried and that a new era of friendship and collaboration had begun—was, in this sense, the visit that Mussolini paid to Pius XI at the Vatican on February 11, 1932, on the third anniversary of the Conciliation.

Long in the making—including, among other things, the conferral of the Order of the Golden Spur on the Duce—the visit was desired above all by the Pope.

In reality, deep down, the agreement did nothing to dispel either side’s mistrust or resentment. It served only to convince both sides of the advisability—given the prevailing Italian and international situation—of avoiding further conflicts and collaborating as much as possible within those limits—which were, in reality, not very broad—where it was possible to do so without jeopardizing the compromise reached regarding their respective principles, while at the same time seeking to exploit this collaboration to secure, each according to their own interests, some small improvement in the status quo to their own advantage.

In short, it served only to give the relationship between the Church and the regime an increasingly marriage-of-convenience character, in which each partner kept one eye on the financial situation and the other on the future, in order to potentially preempt the other on the path to divorce should it no longer be advantageous to remain bound to it.

The situation is more complex for Italian Catholics. As Scoppola rightly noted, after 1931 the majority of them did not have “a clear vision of reality”; that is, they did not realize the fundamental contrast between the Catholic and Fascist positions and did not lose the illusion that the regime was “both a Fascist and a Catholic state”; hence the widespread support of Italian Catholics for the regime.

Apart from the small “Guelf” group (which, incidentally, also had an integralist component and was soon crushed by the police), if there was any Catholic opposition up until around 1938, it was not essentially of an antifascist nature but rather of an integralist nature—that is, more or less linked to the traditional positions of pre-popular and anti-popular Catholicism that had opposed the liberal state.

Within this opposition, more modern positions—more akin to a form of anti-fascism—began to emerge, but only relatively late and within limited groups that generally belonged to the FUCI and the Catholic Action Graduates’ Movement (founded in 1933).

Scoppola has described these as “an intuition—albeit a confused one—of the religious value of freedom as a universal value,” distinct from the traditional claim to the Church’s freedom as a privilege: especially for the period in question, it would not be possible to speak of true anti-fascism without shifting from a general discussion to an examination of certain personal or quasi-personal cases.

Given this reality, it is natural to ask what influence the crisis of 1931 and the way it concluded had on it. As research currently stands, a precise answer is impossible.

However, the evidence at our disposal seems to suggest that the reconciliation of September 2 had an influence and significance that were by no means negligible. By eliminating or greatly reducing popular influence, it undoubtedly fostered the strengthening of traditional pro-fascist and integralist tendencies; on the other hand, it also deepened the detachment and isolation of Catholics organized within Catholic Action from other Catholics.

If we add to this the fact that the events of 1931 provoked—especially among non-youth associations—if not a crisis, then certainly a psychological and organizational stagnation within the ranks of Catholic Action, and largely dampened the enthusiasm and activism that had been sparked by the Conciliation, we can easily understand the gravity of the consequences for the Catholic world of the 1931 reconciliation; therefore, one can better assess the political significance of Mussolini’s success.

Of course, in the long run, the fact that Catholic Action—and in particular its youth associations—managed, for better or worse, to weather the storm of ’31 would bear fruit.

As we will see in the next volume, however, it is a fact that if these fruits did exist—and they were abundant; one need only think of the explosion of the Christian Democrats after the fall of fascism and the origins of its younger leadership—this was due above all to the new Italian and international situation that had taken shape toward the end of the 1930s: without this change in circumstances, it is difficult to say whether, after the defeat of 1931, the mere existence of Catholic Action would have been sufficient to prevent a gradual loss of importance, a gradual disintegration, and a gradual loss of identity among Catholics as such in Italian life.

For the time being, however, Mussolini managed to halt and reverse the Catholic influence among young people and the danger of Catholic competition in the formation of the new ruling class.

This success, on closer inspection, makes the failure of his policy toward young people all the more serious, since it confirms that this policy failed essentially because of the inherent contradiction at its core and not because of resistance or alternatives opposed to it from the outside.

Through all of 1934 and, to some extent, into the first half of 1935, informants’ reports on Catholic Action were virtually unanimous in describing a crisis.

With this overview of the 1931 crisis between Fascism and the Church, we can consider the overall picture of the regime during the years 1929–1934 to be substantially outlined—both in terms of its underlying reality, the major problems it faced, its general trajectory, and the principal contradictions inherent in that trajectory, and, above all, in terms of the role Mussolini played in shaping this underlying reality.

The picture thus outlined, however, refers essentially to what we might call the external aspect of the regime—its projection onto the country as a whole.

To complete this picture, it is therefore necessary now to focus on the more strictly internal aspects—that is, those that pertain primarily (though, of course, not exclusively, since in fact, they often had significant repercussions throughout the country and helped shape the public's attitude toward the regime), on the one hand, the organization of state power; on the other hand, the various components of the regime as seen in their relations with it and in their influence on the Duce's political decisions; and, on yet another hand, the nature of the fascist power group surrounding Mussolini: three aspects of the regime's reality in 1929–1934 that are distinct in many ways but which we believe it is appropriate to treat as cohesively as possible in this second part of the chapter, since only when viewed as a whole do they seem to us to acquire that connection and mutual interdependence which, ultimately, came to shape the broader course of the regime and, therefore, Mussolini's political action.

"I can remove something from the lists presented to me; but add—never." This response by Victor Emmanuel III to former Minister Anile, who had hoped to be appointed a senator, aptly summarizes the sovereign's position toward Mussolini during this period.

Mussolini was formally very courteous toward the king, and during the most serious moments—such as during the 1931 crisis with the Church—he made a point of keeping him informed of the situation and its developments, even outside of the customary periodic audiences and routine communications. Vittorio Emanuele's active political initiative, however, was practically nonexistent.

The Duce tended to keep the monarch out of political choices and decisions as much as possible, and the king—partly due to his own conception of the king's role and partly to avoid friction—almost always refrained from interfering, limiting himself in some cases to advising caution and, if anything, trying to influence those Fascists in Mussolini's inner circle who were closest to him and held staunchly monarchist views.

Saying this does not, however, mean that Victor Emmanuel was politically absent. Aside from the fact that one of his greatest concerns was precisely not to appear absent, not to be forgotten, or to play into the hands of those who tended to deliberately forget him, his political interventions—both direct and indirect—were, on the contrary, anything but nonexistent; it's just that—as his reply to Anile also reveals—they were primarily defensive in nature, aimed at preventing initiatives that might have further weakened his prerogatives, his powers, or the institutions that supported them, first and foremost the Senate and the Armed Forces.

Unless one keeps this modus operandi of the king firmly in mind, it is difficult to understand both the actual terms the foundations upon which, precisely during the period under consideration, the diarchy of sovereign and Duce was established at the apex of the regime, nor one of the most important (and in some cases the only) reasons that led Mussolini to abandon or reject a series of projects aimed at better defining and completing the structure of the regime: on closer inspection, these were always projects that undermined, to a greater or lesser extent, the very foundations of those institutions that Victor Emmanuel III did not want called into question or effectively "fascistized," since his residual power was based on them and, therefore, Mussolini knew the king would defend to the bitter end—even at the cost of an inter-regime crisis that—however it might have ended—the Duce wanted to avoid for the time being, confident that time was on his side and not on the monarchy's.

It is in this light that we must view the fate that befell the various constitutional reform proposals—

both partial and more comprehensive and totalitarian—during the period under consideration here.

Between 1930 and 1931, the Court of Auditors, the State Attorney General's Office, and the Council of State were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Initially, however, the plan had been much more extensive.

In the second half of 1929, in fact, there had been plans to establish a full-fledged Ministry of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The text of the ad hoc measure and the accompanying report indicate that, drawing on the 1925 law regarding the powers of the head of government, the intention was to assign to the specific jurisdiction of the head of government all matters of a general nature—that is, all matters that did not fall under the specific jurisdiction of any single ministry but concerned all ministries and required coordination and integration.

In addition to the Court of Auditors, the State Attorney General's Office, and the Council of State, the prefects and the police were also to be placed under the authority of the new ministry, and two new bodies were to be established: a legislative office of the presidency, responsible for the technical drafting of bills and regulations, and a central inspectorate, "tasked with examining all petitions, requests, and complaints received by the head of government directly from the people or through local authorities, and with conducting the inspections and investigations that the prime minister deems necessary."

After much procrastination and delay, the project was ultimately abandoned (though talk of the Legislative Office continued for years).

In October 1931, however, during a session of the Grand Council, Mussolini stated—and had it recorded in the minutes—that at a subsequent meeting, the supreme body of Fascism would have to address the issue of reforming the Statute.

Based on this decision, the secretary of the PNF, Giuriati, was tasked with studying the issue.

In early July 1933, Giuriati sent Mussolini an initial set of proposals concerning the legislative structure, according to which the Chambers were to be reduced to a single body, half of whose members would be appointed by royal decree upon the recommendation of the Grand Council, and half elected by the Corporations through a two-stage election system.

Upon receiving this initial proposal, Mussolini wrote to Giuriati on July 10:

I have read your paper on the reform of our legislative system not only carefully but thoroughly. Your analysis is spot on. The conclusions require careful consideration.

In any case, I thank you and send you my regards with our usual cordiality.

While Giuriati's proposal was never mentioned again, the same could not be said of constitutional reform. Significant in this regard is the attention and emphasis that *Il Popolo d'Italia* had shown in early 1933 to the proposals publicly put forward by the Attorney General of the Court of Cassation, S. Longhi, to tightly integrate the corporatist system with that of the State (with the corresponding merger of the National Council of the PNF and the Chamber of Deputies into a single corporatist chamber) and, more generally, the ample space the regime allowed for technical-political discussion regarding the advisability of constitutional reform and, in particular, of the system of representation.

In this context, it is therefore not surprising that—following the "elections" of March 25—the new Minister of Justice, De Francisci (who succeeded Rocco in July 1932), presented a new constitutional reform bill to Mussolini in April 1934, whose "conceptual starting point" was that "just as in practice, so too in law, the doctrine of the separation of powers must be considered absolutely obsolete under the fascist regime":

there exists a single, unified sovereign power of government, which is exercised by establishing legal norms (legislative function), ensuring their enforcement and administration (executive and administrative function), and proceeding to punish violations and resolve conflicts (judicial function).

Proceeding from this premise, De Francisci wrote:

The current Parliament still retains its traditional structure as a body established to oversee and, if necessary, to halt the activities of the executive branch through its votes. This structure stands in stark contrast to its desire—which it has demonstrated countless times—to serve instead as an instrument of collaboration with the Government.

The reform I propose aims precisely to adapt the legal structure to this de facto situation, transforming Parliament into an advisory body (except in cases where the Head of Government intends to grant it the power to deliberate on a measure), which, together with the Grand Council, will collaborate in the exercise of the legislative function (Art. I).

This new advisory body—which I have named the National Council, though the name is of no consequence for now—will merge the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Council of Corporations.

It is clear that reforming the Chamber of Deputies would serve no purpose if the Chamber of Life Members were to retain its current structure and functions; on the other hand, it does not seem consistent with the spirit of the regime to undermine or reduce the royal prerogative of appointing life members.

Therefore, the National Council would comprise—in a number not yet determined—both members appointed for life by the King and members elected by the Grand Council for a five-year term (Art. 2)…

According to Article 7, all regulations having the force of law are issued by royal decree, subject to the approval of the Council of Ministers: after consultation with the Grand Council of Fascism regarding constitutional laws pursuant to Article 12 of the Law of December 9, 1928; after consultation with the National Council (whose consultation is mandatory only in the two cases referred to in Article 8 of my proposals); or after consultation with the Sections of the National Council, as determined by the Head of Government. But it is worth repeating that, according to the proposal (except in the cases referred to in Article 8), even consultation with the National Council is not mandatory: thus, the measure approved by the Council of Ministers, ratified and promulgated by the King, has full force of state law.

In this way, all issues concerning the form of legislative measures depending on the subject matter—issues that remain relevant today following Law No. 200 of January 31, 1925, on the executive branch's authority to issue legal norms—are eliminated; and one of the last vestiges of the separation of powers is also eliminated.

I would also consider it useful and politically appropriate to establish the mandatory consultation of the National Council in two cases—cases that affect the entire life of the State—namely, constitutional reforms and budgets, as well as the final accounts; this is also because these are issues in which a broad discussion can prove advantageous to the Government. However, even this obligation established in Article 12 may be waived in cases of absolute and urgent necessity, as provided for in Article 9.

Despite its apparent respect for sovereign prerogatives and its connection to the emerging corporatist system, the De Francisci bill was not enacted either.

And when, as we shall see, by the end of 1936 the issue of the constitutional link between corporate and political representation finally came to the fore and the foundations were laid for the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, the Senate (by then anachronistic) was left entirely untouched, even though, above all, its elimination—or at least its incorporation into the Chamber—might have served as a consolation prize for those Fascists who had always viewed it with suspicion as a refuge for "old

fogies," lukewarm if not hostile to Fascism, and who, on the other hand, were opposed to the creation of the Chamber of Corporations, because they saw it as yet another tool aimed at undermining the PNF and creating a regime that was increasingly a "regime" and less and less a "Fascist State."

Similarly, again in light of relations with the monarchy and Mussolini's desire to resolve them smoothly and over time—that is, when his influence within the diarchy had surpassed that of the king and, most likely, when, with the death of Victor Emmanuel III, the issue would naturally come to the fore—the similar fate that befell, during these same years, the plans for reorganization and effective "fascistization" of the Armed Forces proposed to the Duce (who, significantly, not only did not take them into consideration but did not even urge their implementation, which demonstrates how convinced he was that tampering with the Armed Forces was even more dangerous than tampering with the Senate and the Statute itself) by certain Fascists who were more aware of the risk to the regime of leaving the military world—at least the Army and the Navy, since the Air Force, given its recent establishment and the influence exerted by Balbo and a group of Fascist officers at its helm—in the hands of men who, for the most part, were either more monarchist than Fascist or concerned only with their own careers.

The crucial period for these plans was between 1931 and 1933—not coincidentally, precisely when Mussolini had relinquished personal control over the three military ministries. In previous years, Mussolini had limited himself—exploiting the conflicts between Cavallero and Badoglio—to confining the latter (who was far from popular among Fascists and considered by many to be a traitor) to the role of his "technical advisor."

During this period, if any issue was under discussion, it was that of the MVSN, which numerous Fascist leaders would have liked to incorporate into the Army, both to avoid dangerous dualism and to bring the "living forces of the revolution" into the Army itself.

Toward the end of 1930 (recall General Grazioli's letter to Mussolini dated November 10), however, some military figures and, above all, some prominent Fascist leaders began trying to convince Mussolini of the need to address the military problem at its root.

It was during this period that, as rumors circulated about Gazzera's impending resignation, talk began in some circles of appointing Augusto Turati as Minister of War; this possibility, however, sparked vigorous protests within military circles (Marshal Caviglia wrote to his fellow marshals proposing that, in such an event, they take a joint step of protest, declaring himself, for his part, ready to go as far as resigning), so that the matter was soon dropped.

The most significant move was made by Giuriati on February 22, 1931, with a lengthy memorandum to the Duce, which contained two essential points.

First: a complaint regarding the failure of the Supreme Command (headed by Badoglio) to function properly and, even more seriously, the deficiencies of the Army General Staff.

To remedy this situation, the secretary of the PNF (after insisting on the concept that the General Staff "must be not a corps, but a service; not a caste accessible only to certain officers, but an organization to which all officers, 'including those in the reserve,' can contribute") strongly advocated the need to thoroughly 'fascistize' the army:

both because, by forgetting that moral strength is always—regardless of advances in weaponry—the key element of victory, the high command viewed the revolution with ill-concealed distrust and clung to its outdated methods, unimproved by recent experience, preparing for war outside of and in defiance of Fascism.

Thus, the revolution runs this danger: of finding itself, when necessary, without its bayonets; and because, unlike what happened in the wars of the last century, the most recent war was a war of peoples, and the future war will be so all the more.

“War of peoples” means that not only do armies intervene resolutely in the conduct of hostilities, but each people as a whole contributes to them. While it is therefore understandable that, for the armies of the past, politics was considered a dangerous poison, today it is evident that politics has become the principal weapon of war.

A General Staff that is intellectually detached from the regime it serves, that does not follow the upheavals in other states, that does not study the mentality of other peoples, and that does not concern itself with identifying their “locus minoris resistentiae,” is a nineteenth-century General Staff and, according to General Mangi’s classic irony, is preparing for the war of the past.

Second: the criticism of the irrationality—given Italy’s modest financial resources—of military spending (“roughly, four for the Army, two for the Navy, one for the Air Force”) and the consequent need to radically revise the policy (and strategy) regarding the three branches of the military:

We have asked ourselves whether, given the scarcity of our resources and the impossibility of competing with our most likely enemies, it would not be more rational to seek the possibility of victory in a shift of these proportions?

It is clear that by mimicking our likely enemies in the proportion of our expenditures, we will one day —given their financial superiority—face a less powerful army against a more powerful one, a less powerful navy against a more powerful one, and a less powerful air force against a more powerful one; in other words, we will go to war under conditions of absolute inferiority.

The opposite would occur if we concentrated our maximum effort on the area where we could become decisively superior to the enemy.

Yes, we must keep alive our claim to naval parity, given that the world has fixated on focusing the debate on naval armaments; but we must prepare the world's most powerful weapon in the air. Two thousand airplanes can be worth more than a "dreadnought." They can secure victory before the country suffers the damage resulting from the closure of the Strait of Gibraltar.

In line with this approach, when he discussed his memorandum with Mussolini, Giuriati suggested appointing Italo Balbo—a staunch fascist, an expert in aviation, and a highly popular figure in Italy and abroad—as Chief of the General Staff in place of Badoglio.

"Balbo," he told him, "has been appointed Air Marshal: this shows that you consider him competent in military matters. With his Atlantic crossing, Balbo has proven himself to be a formidable organizer and has earned a worldwide reputation.

Moreover, Balbo is a Fascist, whereas Badoglio is not; you need to prepare the armed forces of the Fascist revolution, not those of just any liberal state."

However, nothing could convince the Duce. If Giuriati's move had any effect, it was practically only to increase his distrust and, perhaps, his jealousy of the Quadrumvir.

If Mussolini considered a reform of the armed forces during this period, he most likely never went beyond the idea of unifying the three military ministries into a single one, and even this remained practically unimplemented—or, rather, was carried out by him in the worst and most bureaucratic manner: by personally assuming command of the ministries, first the Ministry of War in July 1933, and the other two the following November.

And it is certainly not without significance that his reinstatement to the ministries of the Navy and Air Force took place just a few weeks after Balbo—who had just returned from his second transatlantic flight—had presented him (apparently with the endorsement of Caviglia, Grazioli, and Carletti) a detailed plan for the reorganization and modernization of the armed forces, the strengthening of the Air Force, the unification of the military ministries into a single one (to be headed by Mussolini), and the modification of the powers of the Chief of the General Staff, so as to make him effectively responsible for the preparedness of the armed forces; he had also put himself forward as a candidate for this position to replace Badoglio.

Given such an obvious coincidence—and considering the manner in which Balbo's removal from the Ministry of Aviation and his appointment as governor of Libya took place, an appointment that the Quadrumvirate viewed as a sort of golden exile— it is natural to wonder whether Mussolini's decision to reassume control of all military ministries was not a ploy to simultaneously thwart both Balbo's plans and his ambitions.

To think—as some have indeed suggested—that the Duce's decision was dictated not only by personal jealousy but also by the fear that a major military reform would be ill-timed at that moment, since it might have interfered with preparations for the Ethiopian war, is, in our view, impossible: in November 1933, the Ethiopian campaign was still, as will be seen, in a completely embryonic stage of preparation—one that, in any case, could not have been technically compromised by the adoption of Balbo's reform.

Unless, that is, one shifts the focus from the technical to the political level; in other words, unless one assumes that Mussolini—anticipating the reluctance of the sovereign and men like Badoglio to embark on a potential colonial conflict—believed that it was not the right time to provoke further causes for controversy with Victor Emmanuel III and the army leaders.

But this merely brings us back to our fundamental thesis and confirms it all the more: it reinforces the point that Mussolini did not want to meddle with the armed forces because he knew that doing so would create serious difficulties for him with the monarchy.

Based on what we have said, it is easy to understand that, in our view, we cannot agree with the viewpoint of those who have argued that "Mussolini always sought to give his relationships with the military (and not only with them) a personal character, addressing the men themselves rather than their official positions and grading the trust he accorded them based on the devotion and support shown to him"; so that "he used to choose his collaborators not for their ideas or abilities, but for their suitability to fit into his policy of personal power; in fact, he allowed them great freedom of action (essentially limiting himself to rubber-stamping the most spectacular decisions), but demanded that his role as an infallible and irreplaceable leader be recognized and reinforced."

When applied to the military, this viewpoint can be accepted only if it is made clear that—since he could not push the fascistization of the armed forces too far to avoid clashes with the king—Mussolini had, in practice, no other recourse than personal relationships and, in some cases, more or less explicit corruption to counterbalance to some extent the monarchy's influence over the military hierarchy.

If, however, one wishes to extend this to serve as a framework for interpreting the Duce's relationships with his other collaborators—and in particular with the true fascists—it must be completely rejected.

In reality, Mussolini never—especially after 1924—placed genuine trust in any of his collaborators, nor did he, by any means, grant them freedom of action.

On the contrary, he exploited them all and viewed them with suspicion—partly because of his deep-seated distrust of people, partly because he feared they might become too deeply entrenched in a particular position and build around it a sort of personal legacy or fiefdom of their own, which would diminish his personal power; partly out of jealousy, for fear that they might gain too much prestige, overshadow his legend, and—even without undermining his power—attempt to secure positions of succession for themselves, which would inevitably stir up jealousy and factional strife and lead to the formation of dangerous alliances of interests around the man or men "of tomorrow."

Hence his conviction that everyone should serve a relatively short "term" in the offices they held (rarely more than four to five years) and that there should be periodic "rotations" and "changes of guard" in the various offices.

Hence—precisely during the period we are examining—the need for him to dismantle, within a few

years, the “grand cabinet” he had formed in September 1929, thereby parting ways with some of the finest men he had called to the government and personally resuming responsibility for a large portion of the ministries he had relinquished; partly because he expected everyone to be merely executors of his will, without independent judgment or convictions of their own, unless these aligned with his; partly to put an end to controversies and clashes of opinions and interests by substituting his own opinion for the—far more questionable—opinion of any given minister; and partly to remove from the scene those who seemed to him to be gaining too much prestige.

We have just discussed Balbo’s case. However, it was not the only one during those years. Another, in July 1932, was that of Grandi, whom we will discuss in the next chapter.

Along with Grandi, Rocco was replaced by De Francisci, Mosconi by Jung, Giuliano by Ercole, and Bottai by Mussolini himself; Giunta was also replaced as undersecretary to the Presidency by Rossoni.

Of these four replacements, one—that of B. Giuliano—had no particular political significance; at most, it might indicate a certain rise in Gentile’s personal standing. The replacement of A. Rocco, in turn, was practically a foregone conclusion: Minister of Justice since January 5, 1925, Rocco (who would die in 1935) had by then amply completed his “cycle”; if one really wishes to find a political motivation behind his replacement, it can be found in the difficulties that his rigid ideological and legal reactionism could create for Mussolini and in his tendency to give the regime a rigid legal and constitutional framework that the Duce did not understand but felt could cage him.

As for A. Mosconi’s dismissal, aside from the fact that this minister, too, had been in office for four years by then, it was due in part to Mosconi’s own insistence, partly to his disagreements with Mussolini over the issue of the conversion of annuities, and partly to the Duce’s need to have a man at the Ministry of Finance who, on the one hand, was more well-connected in the Italian and international economic and financial world and, on the other, better suited to tackle the economic crisis and, in particular, to defend the lira at all costs.

Hence the choice of Guido Jung, who, as Guarneri wrote, “marked the beginning of a policy of more decisive state intervention in the country’s economic life” and, we might add, provided Mussolini with the right man to implement that policy of “stubbornly maintaining the lira at ninety” (even though England had already devalued the pound and the United States was preparing to do the same with the dollar)—a policy he was determined to make a sort of “banner” of his own.

A different discussion is warranted regarding Bottai’s replacement. Bottai would be, along with Grandi, one of only two prominent Fascist figures who, after an initial stint in government as a minister, would return years later to head a ministry.

For him, therefore, one cannot speak of being sidelined; however, to simply assume that for him, too, it was a normal rotation at the conclusion of his “cycle” at the Corporations would be too simplistic.

In July 1932, the corporatist system was still in limbo, so it would not have been at all unusual for Bottai to remain in the government until its final adoption—just as it had not been unusual in 1929 for Rocco to be confirmed, even though he had been a minister for five years.

Although we lack precise documents to prove it, we are convinced that Bottai’s replacement held a very specific significance for Mussolini (who, not coincidentally, personally resumed the Ministry of Corporations).

However, this significance should not be sought—as some have done—in the mishap at the Ferrara conference: Mussolini had been aware of the Spirito report in advance and had not prevented it; Bottai could not therefore be held responsible for it by the Duce, and, moreover, he had immediately and explicitly criticized it. The reasons for Bottai's replacement must be sought elsewhere.

On the one hand, in a certain lack of scruples in his conduct and a certain independence of judgment—even though these qualities were accompanied by a remarkable "sense of expediency" and an equally remarkable ability to recognize the limit beyond which it was not prudent for him to go, and indeed, when it was better to fall back obediently "into the ranks."

On the other hand, in the hostility that Bottai had drawn upon himself in recent months among major industrialists due to the "Faggella project" for reforming industrial property legislation, and due to his stances against the spirit and practice with which many industrialists intended and implemented the mandatory consortia (which he had first criticized but later accepted, provided they were contingent, exceptional measures coordinated by corporate bodies) and turned to the state for aid.

Among these particularly harsh and explicit stances was the one he took in the Chamber of Deputies on February 24, 1932.

"The greatest obstacle to a harmonious corporatist structure," he had said on that occasion, "stems from the substitution of inter-group conflict for class struggle and from those sectors that 'either retain an individualistic and monopolistic mindset or prefer the comfortable life they have secured for themselves':

There are certain short-sighted producers who for years have advocated and practiced an economic policy revolving around just two pillars: wage cuts and tariff protection. Hoping to be able to export more widely, but certain that this would lead to a decrease in real wages, certain factions among industrialists pursued inflationary policies for as long as they could; when they could no longer do so, they turned to raising customs tariffs.

Now, all of this is the antithesis of the corporate spirit… No less pronounced, in other sectors, is the monopolistic tendency, masked by a consortium-oriented mindset.

It has become fashionable, as soon as there is a sense that things are not going well in a particular sector, to call for a consortium…

Unless guided and regulated by the State's organizing intervention, tendencies toward consortia are always antithetical to the corporatist principle. We are by no means willing to play along with the facile game of slapping a "corporate" label on economic formations that can flourish quite happily in the shadow of any liberal state—or, rather, of any of those states that delude themselves or seek to delude

others into believing they are still liberal.

Finally, yet another reason for Bottai's replacement lies in his conception of corporatism—and in particular in his hostility toward the ever-increasing number of non-corporate initiatives that were authorized or undertaken directly by other ministries—as well as in his tendency to turn his department into a sort of ministry of economic planning.

These were all matters on which—as we have already stated and explained at length—Mussolini was unwilling or unable to publicly agree with him, and which created a series of obstacles in too many circles to allow Bottai to remain in his post.

It is extremely significant in this regard that—once Bottai was removed—the corporatist system, while on the one hand resuming its course and being officially launched between the end of 1933 and the end of 1934 with a great propaganda campaign as "the instrument that, under the aegis of the State, implements the comprehensive, organic, and unified regulation of the productive forces, with a view to the development of wealth, political power, and the well-being of the Italian people," on the other hand, it came into being in the worst possible way: a cumbersome machine, afflicted with bureaucratic elephantiasis, which would always function poorly and often not at all, and thus would not solve any of the problems it claimed to solve—and which, in fact, it often ended up exacerbating; a machine that, once the initial moment of enthusiasm, hope, and fears had passed, ended up in practice being exploited primarily by economic interests (it is no coincidence that in 1943 V. Cini would define corporatism as "the last trench of capitalism"), benefiting workers neither directly nor indirectly, and serving no purpose even for the regime.

Moreover, this system did not tie Mussolini's hands at all; on the contrary, at least for the time being, it allowed him to declare that Fascism was increasingly "on the march" along the social path and that, by drawing the world's attention to the Italian experiment, it significantly enhanced his prestige.

The most significant and dramatic replacement, however, came the following year with that of Leandro Arpinati. Arpinati was not only the undersecretary of the Interior—in practice, the minister—but also one of the most prominent figures in fascism: as late as 1941, G. Ciano wrote in his diary, "Among the men of the regime, Arpinati is someone."

Impulsive, perhaps not very intelligent, and possessing the typical education of a self-taught man, he was nonetheless a man of great personal integrity, uncompromising, deeply loyal to Mussolini yet without any flattery, and politically a "purist"; from his original individualist anarchism, he had gradually shifted toward a form of fascism characterized, on the one hand, by a strong Pantaleoni-style liberalism and, on the other, by a profound sense of the state; despite his fascism and the office he held, he had not severed his ties with various anti-fascists.

As undersecretary, he had sought to curb certain blatantly lawless tendencies, to limit the party's interference in the state, to ensure the proper functioning of municipal and provincial public administration, and to combat profiteers and social climbers.

Contrary to the generally accepted practice, for example, he had allowed local and parastatal entities to

hold competitive exams without requiring participants to be members of the National Fascist Party (PNF) and ensured that the top candidate on the shortlist was selected as the winner, without discrimination between members and non-members.

This character and conduct of his, combined with the great power and prestige he had acquired, had naturally aroused much hostility and jealousy toward him, which at times went so far as to portray him as “the Stalin of Fascism” (just as, for some, Balbo was “the Trotsky” and the “vice-Duce,” an aspiring successor).

Initially powerless, his opponents had grown stronger and more numerous following the appointment of Starace—who detested him—as party secretary. However strong and numerous they may have been, these hostilities could not have brought about his downfall had Mussolini not taken a stand against him.

In choosing Arpinati in 1929 for the position of undersecretary of the Interior, Mussolini must also have seen a way to resolve the situation in Bologna: to distance Arpinati from his past and, at the same time, not place him locally in a position of inferiority compared to Grandi.

At the heart of the decision, however, was above all a positive personal assessment of the man and the fascist; so much so that—according to A. Iraci, who served as Arpinati’s chief of staff—Mussolini had even considered appointing him minister outright, and if he did not do so, it was only at Arpinati’s own suggestion. And, for once, he had not been mistaken.

Over time, it had become clear that the two held differing views on many issues. In particular, Arpinati was a staunch opponent of corporatism and of any form—whether explicit or covert—of state intervention in the economy.

He was certainly not alone in this position; at the top of the regime, corporatism was viewed with suspicion by quite a few people—albeit with different nuances and motivations—such as Turati, Giuriati, Rossoni, and De Bono. The difference was that, unlike them, Arpinati publicly expressed his aversion.

On August 10, 1931, during a speech delivered in Pistoia, he went so far as to say:

The state cannot do everything; it cannot provide for everything. We must guard against certain tendencies that would seek to entrust the state with those tasks and duties that are the exclusive preserve of the private sector.

No state has ever been a good industrialist or a good merchant. All experiments in this direction have entailed—and continue to entail—grave sacrifices and no less grave illusions…

When the state does not intervene to help the elderly and children, it always ends up supporting the least deserving, the negligent, the inept, and the incapable, to the detriment of the willing, the capable, and the active. All of this leads to a state of chaos that, while harming and demoralizing the good,

increases the number of parasites who hope to live forever at the expense of the community.

And it is easy to foresee how such ideas will lead, sooner or later, to widespread disillusionment and general ruin. Fascism carried out its revolution against these tendencies and to prevent our country from being swept away by that leftist utopia, which is devastating a great people and a great nation.

Faced with such an explicit stance, Mussolini felt compelled to give Arpinati an equally explicit and public response.

Eight days later, speaking at the Campidoglio to celebrate the centennial of the Council of State, he had emphatically reiterated that the Fascist state was corporatist, “indeed Fascist because it is corporatist and vice versa, since without the corporatist constitution… there is no Fascist revolution,” he had defined as a “petty-bourgeois, philistine conception of the Fascist revolution”—“to be rejected as a parody and an insult”—the view of those who reduced the Fascist revolution to the “mere establishment of a strong government capable of guaranteeing public order in all circumstances,” and he had concluded forcefully:

To continue debating whether the economic sphere falls within the State and belongs to the State is simply, at best, absurd and unworkable.

No aspect of individual or collective life can be removed from the State; indeed, every sphere falls within the State and exists only insofar as it is part of the State.

Having thus set the record straight before everyone, the matter came to no further head for Mussolini: the morning after the speech at the Campidoglio, Arpinati tendered his resignation as undersecretary, but Mussolini did not accept it and reaffirmed his appreciation for Arpinati’s collaboration. He did the same the following year, in early May, when Arpinati resubmitted his resignation, this time for strictly personal reasons (a car accident in which an innocent person had been killed—apparently through no fault of Arpinati’s).

In light of these facts, it is therefore difficult to believe that Arpinati’s replacement and his subsequent political downfall were merely the result of the differences of opinion that existed between him and Mussolini on many issues; all the more so since there is no evidence that serious friction arose between the two during Arpinati’s final months at the Ministry of the Interior.

Agostino Iraci, who was a close collaborator and friend of Arpinati's and who wrote his biography, argued that Mussolini did not like the Bolognese party leader but understood the value of his collaboration and, ultimately, hoped "that he would end up taming this undisciplined protégé" and that the situation would eventually come to a head even against his will.

In our view, this is a substantially balanced and acceptable assessment, one that is only apparently contradicted by Mussolini's remarks about Arpinati as reported by G. Ciano in his diary; these remarks, again in our view, do not in any way prove the persistence of hatred toward the former undersecretary (the origin of which, in any case, the origin of which should be established, whether linked to the events of April '33 or to Arpinati's subsequent defiant attitude), but should be understood as a reference to the imposition of internal exile, to which even men as politically important as Arpinati could be subjected.

The true architect of Arpinati's downfall, in fact, was Starace (who must have been planning it at least since the second half of '32); Mussolini sanctioned it half-heartedly and only after trying to avoid it (probably above all to avert a scandal—partly forced upon him by Arpinati's own impulsiveness in reacting against Starace— and partly to avoid a showdown between the two that would inevitably have ended in a scandal even more sensational than Arpinati's resignation—and which, in any case, could not have failed to bring about the political downfall of one of the protagonists (and, between the loyal Starace—who was, moreover, secretary of the PNF—and the undersecretary of the Interior, who was so out of line, the choice was practically a foregone conclusion for the Duce).

The pretext chosen by Starace to attack Arpinati was the latter's insistence on granting M. Missiroli PNF membership.

Mussolini, like many old-guard Fascists, had no sympathy for the former editor of *Il Resto del Carlino* and *Il Secolo* (in 1927, writing to his brother, he had called him "a subversive mind"); Arpinati, on the other hand, was his friend, was influenced by his ideas, and considered him a great journalist.

This charge was accompanied by several others, including that of opposing the regime's economic policy—and corporatism in particular—and that of speaking ill of the Duce's family members.

As Iraci explained, this last accusation stemmed from the fact that, since the Duce's wife had supported one of the bidders for the concession of the Castrocaro Thermal Baths and the prefect of Forlì had turned to Arpinati for advice on how to proceed, Arpinati had replied: "Italy is not a fiefdom of the Mussolini family."

On April 27, 1933, during the customary morning briefing, Mussolini confronted Arpinati with these accusations; Arpinati rejected them, and the matter could likely have been resolved without further harm had the Bolognese party leader—impulsive as he was—not written a scathing note to Starace immediately after the meeting, calling him a liar and a coward.

The logical consequence could only have been a duel between the two, but Mussolini obviously would not hear of it, and, not wanting to sacrifice Starace, on May 1 he asked Arpinati to resign.

Perhaps Arpinati's fate was not yet entirely sealed at this point. But what precipitated the situation was, instead of the customary deferential and grateful letter with which those resigning were in the habit of doing so, another extremely curt note from Arpinati ("Dear President, following and in accordance with

the invitation addressed to me in today's letter, I hereby tender my resignation from the Office of the Secretary of State for the Interior. With undiminished devotion. Arpinati")—which Mussolini's chief of staff and other Fascist leaders tried in vain to get him to revise, and which allowed Starace to launch his final decisive attack in the form of a lengthy accusatory letter to the Duce dated May 3, in which every possible charge against Arpinati was compiled.

Across eight densely written pages, some twenty accusations were leveled, including the allegation that he was preparing to succeed the Duce; and, to top it all off, the letter even insinuated that Arpinati had played a part in the Zamboni assassination attempt on October 31 in Bologna:

Arpinati's act of solidarity toward Missiroli led me to reflect on all his behaviors—including his conduct during the Zamboni assassination attempt, during the trial, and afterward—behaviors I had been monitoring for a year and to which I had attached some importance, knowing the man's temperament and mindset. My doubts were immediately dispelled.

Arpinati had demonstrated that he possessed a mindset different from mine—namely, a non-fascist mindset. And I reported him to you, fully confident that I had, as always, fulfilled my duty.

On the evening of May 4, an official statement announced that Arpinati had resigned "for personal reasons" and that Mussolini had appointed the Honorable Guido Buffarini-Guidi to replace him as Undersecretary of the Interior.

At the governmental level, the Arpinati affair ended at this point. At the party and personal levels, however, it had an even more dramatic aftermath. As in the case of Augusto Turati, Arpinati's political downfall was followed shortly thereafter by his personal ruin.

His enemies, in fact, did not relent until, in July of the following year, they first succeeded in having him expelled from the PNF, then in having him arrested—along with some of his friends from Bologna—on charges of insubordination and of "having adopted and maintained an attitude blatantly contrary to the directives and unity of the regime," and finally in having him sentenced to five years of internal exile.

At this point, however, the question arises again regarding Mussolini's role in this second phase of the Arpinati affair.

There is no doubt that the charges were essentially false. If the former undersecretary could be blamed for anything, it was only for refusing to humiliate himself and for adopting a proud and defiant attitude. He maintained this same attitude in the following years (the first two on Lipari, the other three on his farm at Malacappa), and it earned him, upon the expiration of his sentence, a renewal of his confinement for another five years.

It is highly significant that the report by the Bologna police chief—in which, on May 25, 1939, he was recommended for a new five-year term of confinement—emphasizes above all the fact that Arpinati had shown “no sign of repentance,” that he kept saying he would never ask for a pardon, and that, as soon as he was free, “he would demand an explanation from the Duce as to why he had been confined,” and that, on the occasion of the conquest of Ethiopia, he had scornfully refused to send Mussolini—as some friends had suggested, confident that it would be “decisive for his situation”—a telegram worded as follows: “Duce, my greatest sorrow at this moment is that I cannot be among the crowd applauding you.”

In our view, there is only one explanation for Mussolini’s behavior. The Duce was not a cruel man; during the years of the regime, he authorized or personally decided on many acts of clemency; in some cases, he even went so far as to help—or allow others to help—his former adversaries or their family members rebuild their lives. All of this, however, had to be accompanied by an act of repentance, an appeal to his understanding, and a recognition of his magnanimity.

If yesterday’s adversary—if the victim—was willing to yield, to admit defeat, and to appeal for his mercy, Mussolini was in turn ready to forgive and even to help.

But Arpinati was not a man to yield, to admit to faults he did not feel he had committed, or to understand Mussolini’s “higher reasons” for not breaking with him completely at first and for granting clemency later. Hence his political downfall and ruin, which, however, while they deeply irritated the Duce for years (to the point that while Muti succeeded in having Turati rehabilitated, he failed to secure Arpinati’s release from exile), must ultimately have kept alive in him a respect for the man; so much so that—as we shall see—during the time of the Italian Social Republic (RSI), he would have sought his collaboration in vain.

From what we have been saying, it seems we can conclude that Arpinati’s replacement and his political downfall were primarily due to personal factors.

These were determined not so much by disagreements with Mussolini on certain political issues as by the climate and power struggles typical of authoritarian regimes—which, under Starace’s military-bureaucratic administration, were becoming increasingly murky and, indeed, personalistic: following the Turati affair, Arpinati’s case is emblematic above all of the degeneration that was now beginning to erode the regime from within and which, on closer inspection, pushed political and ideological differences into the background, to the sole benefit of those centered on mere power.

Indirectly, however, Arpinati’s replacement also had significant consequences for the regime.

In his passionate defense of Arpinati, A. Iraci wrote that, after Arpinati’s ouster:

everything changed within Fascism, especially among its highest ranks, which, moreover, had by then been completely overhauled—and certainly not in a way that elevated the moral qualities of those appointed. They realized they could act with impunity. The watchful eye of the “unarmed censor”—as it came to be called—was no longer there.

The danger of Bocchini's "reports" remained. But Bocchini, who above all wished to keep his position—and, in any case, had no interest in matters of morality—could easily be co-opted by those in power. And so it was.

During the second phase of Fascism, and increasingly toward its end, the abuse of authority and public funds by those in power became the norm; there was no longer any discretion or oversight.

And this phenomenon—which, after all, is characteristic of every era of decadence—took on forms and proportions that explain the reputation for widespread dishonesty that, perhaps even more than is warranted, has remained attached to the Fascist regime…

According to Iraci, an important factor in this shift was the appointment of Buffarini-Guidi as Undersecretary of the Interior to replace Arpinati:

this Tuscan—corpulent and ruddy-faced, shrewd and intelligent, devoid of principles and scruples—was precisely the right man to complement Starace. The Ministry of the Interior, as soon as Buffarini entered it, accompanied by a large retinue of clients, changed its character…

As we have had occasion to note, the Ministry of the Interior had always been—even under fascism—a rather strict overseer of everything that took place in the country, and also the ultimate safeguard for citizens whose rights had been violated; it then became the accomplice, the participant, and the guarantor of all the abuses, acts of oppression, and immoralities that were perpetrated with increasing frequency in the name of fascism.

From a historical perspective, such an explanation—a direct and mechanical cause-and-effect relationship between Arpinati's removal, his replacement by Buffarini-Guidi, and the emergence of a radically different climate within Fascism—cannot, of course, be accepted; to adopt it would be an extremely simplistic oversimplification. Nevertheless, Iraci has accurately captured how, objectively speaking, the Arpinati affair occurred at a time when the regime, from within, was beginning its downward spiral, was beginning to corrupt itself at its very core—we might even say in its particular morality; at the very moment when the logic of dictatorial power was beginning to deeply erode Mussolini and make him increasingly a prisoner of his own myth and his own grandeur.

A grandeur that absolutely required both ever-new successes and a totalitarian facade—without cracks or shadows of any kind—and which, therefore, could rely only on the hands of mediocre or unscrupulous executors, convinced or willing to do anything to achieve it, without realizing (or daring to admit) the future risks and the immediate cost this entailed not only for the country but for the regime itself; they were content with the facade without caring about the foundations (or caring about them only in a bureaucratic and repressive manner) and, all too often, tended to equate the regime's "interest" with their own personal and concrete interests; and, in doing so, gradually corrupted—through their example and through the active and passive code of silence implicit in their behavior—the higher and central structures of the regime, which, in turn, inevitably could not help but progressively corrupt the lower and peripheral ones.

Iraci identified Arpinati's elimination as the watershed moment beyond which the regime would change; others, as we have seen, have identified this same watershed in the rise of Staracism; still others have seen it in the grandiose and often ridiculous celebrations in 1932 marking the "tenth anniversary" of Fascism's rise to power.

At first glance, these points of reference appear different; in reality, they all fall within a substantially common timeframe and are, in fact, underpinned by a shared assessment. This can be explained by the particular perspective from which observers and historians have each approached the same reality and, at the same time, by the difficulty of truly identifying such turning points, which, as such, are the sum of a whole series of specific facts and moments.

The fact remains, however, that for everyone the turning point lies roughly between 1932 and 1934; that is, the fact remains that the regime's internal decline began at the very moment when it enjoyed the greatest popular support in the country—before the major foreign policy initiatives, and before Mussolini's physical decline set in.

Delving into the details of these turning points would therefore not only be pointless but also absurd.

There is, however, one point that cannot be overlooked here. It has been said that the death of Arnaldo Mussolini had a very significant influence on the evolution of his brother's personality and on his political actions themselves (in the sense that with Arnaldo's death, the only truly moderating influence was lost).

Since Arnaldo Mussolini died suddenly on December 21, 1931, it is natural to wonder whether his death truly had the impact on his brother that some have attributed to it.

Mussolini was very fond of Arnaldo and placed absolute trust in him. One could almost say that, after 1924, his brother was the only person in whom he truly trusted (symptomatic of this is the remark he made to M. Ferraguti on the day of the funeral, with a mixture of sadness and bitter sarcasm: "Now I'll have to trust everyone…") and with whom he was on intimate terms: his only true friend.

Even in matters concerning his own family—and in particular his children—he confided more in him (and in his sister Edvige) than in his wife.

Edda's marriage to Galeazzo Ciano in 1930, for example, was—at least in the very early stages—conceived by Arnaldo to accommodate his brother's desire to find (after a couple of semi-engagements he had not approved of) a husband for his restless and eccentric daughter.

Since the formation of the government in 1922, Arnaldo had edited *Il Popolo d'Italia* (*Gerarchia*, on the other hand, had been entrusted to Margherita Sarfatti). As the Duce wrote in his biography of Arnaldo, the two brothers consulted with each other daily:

Every evening for nine years, around 10 p.m., I would call Arnaldo on the phone. Our conversation went something like this: "What's new?"

"What are you working on for tomorrow morning?"

"I'd like you to write an article on such-and-such an issue."

"I really liked your article this morning—clear and to the point."

Arnaldo was extremely proud of this praise and equally disheartened by my rebukes, which almost always referred to the inevitable minor shortcomings I sometimes found throughout the newspaper, ranging from printing errors to duplicate news items.

Whenever Arnaldo had doubts—that is, whenever he feared his article might create embarrassment for my administration—he would send it to me for review, either as a manuscript or in proofs.

Despite this close connection with his brother, however, Arnaldo had remained the de facto editor-in-chief of *Il Popolo d'Italia* until the day of his death.

Several of his articles—for example, most of those written during the 1931 crisis with the Church—had been published without prior agreement with his brother and expressed his personal point of view.

For while Arnaldo had been a valuable collaborator and advisor to his brother for about twelve years (and a sort of right-hand man in the Lombard capital, from where he maintained discreet contacts with a wide range of circles, especially economic ones), he had not merely been his spokesman.

The correspondence between the two clearly shows that—while he admired his brother and was in substantial agreement with him—he had his own position, had actively participated in the political life of the regime, taking a clear stance in public and in private on various issues and the people involved in

them, and exerting considerable influence on his brother.

On some of these issues, his letters often reveal him to be harsh and uncompromising, at times calling for drastic measures against opponents and Fascists who did not toe the party line.

Overall, however—that is, looking beyond individual cases—it is highly likely that his influence and advice succeeded in moderating, to some extent, his brother's harsh temperament and egocentrism.

Arnaldo's sudden death hit Mussolini hard.

"The shock was so sudden and severe that it will take a long time before my nerves can regain their balance. I have cried and I am still crying," he wrote four days later to his sister Edvige.

And this firsthand account is confirmed by those of his wife and of those who had the opportunity to see and speak with him during those days. That very same day, as a tribute to the memory of his late brother, he began writing *The Life of Arnaldo*, which was published the following fall.

From a political standpoint, this work is of little interest, and even from a biographical perspective it does not offer many new details, although the first chapters—dedicated to their shared childhood and adolescence—are imbued with a certain subdued, poignant sadness.

Its interest lies rather in the constant celebration of Arnaldo's humanity and his journalistic and political collaboration with his brother; all done with unquestionable sincerity and at times with passion (as in the passage, already mentioned, in which he alludes to the "Belloni affair" and the accusations that had then been leveled against Arnaldo's personal integrity) and always emphasizing the affection and trust that had bound them together. Despite its somewhat rhetorical tone, the closing lines of the little volume are typical in this regard:

I have suffered and will continue to suffer for a long time because of his death: like those of the body, the wounds of the spirit are irreparable. I feel the pain of Arnaldo's passing like a secret fire that will always accompany me—a fire that fuels my will and my faith. I will bear this burden for him as well, so that all his toil, his passion, and his pain may not be lost; so that his memory may be honored; so that the ideals in which he believed may triumph and endure, even and above all beyond my own lifetime.

Beyond the emotional aspect, Arnaldo's death had, above all, the consequence of depriving Mussolini —as has been said—of the only person with whom he was truly on familiar terms and with whom he could find moments of relaxation and ease; the only person he trusted completely and whose advice he did not fear was self-serving.

In this sense, one might even wonder whether, psychologically speaking, a connection can be drawn between his brother's death, the end of his relationship with Sarfatti shortly thereafter (the only significant one during the 1920s and early 1930s), and his turning instead to increasingly frequent

casual affairs—without any emotional commitment—with women who, quite often, were meant above all to flatter his pride and confirm, even in this very particular regard, his prestige and magnetic charm.

What is certain, in any case, is that Arnaldo's death left Mussolini in almost complete isolation and contributed to exacerbating his psychological tendency to distrust everyone, to feel surrounded by fragile and insecure collaborators, and, consequently, to see himself increasingly as the driving force and controller of everything—the leader who had to do everything and centralize everything in himself.

We do not believe more than this can be said; except, at most—and we repeat—that with Arnaldo's death, the only person who had sometimes managed to temper certain outbursts of Mussolini's temperament and curb his egocentrism was gone.

However significant Arnaldo's death may have been on a human and personal level for Mussolini, we do not believe it can be considered a watershed moment in the Duce's political career: for as considerable as Arnaldo's influence on his brother may have been, the truly strong personality between the two was that of Mussolini, whom his brother had always regarded as the Duce—albeit, unlike others, without flattery—and whose policies he had essentially approved of, limiting himself at most to discussing specific aspects of them.

It is therefore difficult to imagine that, had he not died prematurely, Arnaldo could have brought about a different course for his brother's policies.

Between 1932 and 1934, the regime—as we have noted—began its downward spiral. This, however, is an observation we can make today, in hindsight, taking into account a whole series of factors and signs.

At the time, not only did no one realize this, but no one was even remotely touched by such an idea—neither in Italy nor abroad, neither among the Fascists nor among the most serious anti-Fascists (we obviously leave out of our discussion, because they are irrelevant to our purposes, those for whom, for years, Fascism had always been in the final phase of its rule).

On the contrary, all external factors led one to believe that the regime had never been so solid and had never enjoyed such broad support, both domestically and internationally.

The so-called "official" confirmation of this stability and the corresponding domestic support came for Mussolini and the regime from the second plebiscite, the "elections" of March 25, 1934.

For Fascism, the outcome of the "elections" was, of course, a foregone conclusion from the start.

Nevertheless, from 1932 onward, a whole series of the regime's initiatives and Mussolini's public statements can be seen as having been conceived with these "elections" in mind—as a sort of massive propaganda campaign aimed at laying the groundwork for success and broadening public support to plebiscitary levels through a massive and skillful effort to manipulate public opinion nationwide, designed to entrench the idea that the regime was more stable than ever, that it was to his credit that he had managed to steer the ship of the Italian economy in the best possible way through the stormy seas of the Great Depression, and that, with the crisis now being overcome, the regime was on the verge of resuming its march toward economic development and social progress that would not only constitute the long-awaited "third phase" of Fascism, but would also show the entire world the path to follow in order to overcome the contradictions and crises of capitalism and to avoid communism—all while carefully stoking the nationalist sentiment and colonial aspirations alive in a segment of the bourgeoisie

through a series of references to Italy's rightful place among the great powers and to the aspirations thwarted by the Treaty of Versailles.

The "election campaign" began with the "tenth-anniversary" celebrations: a grand and widespread celebration of the regime's merits and achievements and a projection of it into the future, during which all the most modern tools of mass propaganda were employed on a vast scale, and Starace had ample opportunity to demonstrate (all too often in the most bombastic, grotesque, and rhetorical ways) his skills as an organizer and choreographer of the masses. On the occasion of these celebrations, as already mentioned, membership registration for the PNF was reopened, a move that more than one observer interpreted as a sort of pre-plebiscite.

Fascism and Mussolini himself certainly attributed this significance to the subscriptions for Treasury bonds that opened in April 1932 and January 1934 and which achieved excellent results, given that within just a few days both issues raised sums far greater than those anticipated.

Also on the occasion of the "tenth anniversary," at the end of 1932, an amnesty and pardon were granted, extended even to political crimes: according to official data, out of 1,056 individuals convicted of political crimes, 639 regained their freedom thanks to the clemency measure; in addition to them, 595 political detainees were released.

Furthermore, the measures by which a number of exiles—including G. Salvemini, A. De Ambris, G. Donati, C. Rossi, and A. Fasciolo—had been stripped of their citizenship in January 1926 were revoked. The political significance of the act of clemency is clear: through it, the regime sought to demonstrate both its strength and its generosity—and thus that it had by now achieved complete victory over anti-fascism.

Mussolini's remarks to the Chamber of Deputies on November 16, 1932—during the official celebration of the "tenth anniversary"—fit well within this context and perspective:

As the first decade of the ten that were planned and are certain to come to an end, the Fascist revolution is more powerful than ever, because it is enduring and unceasing…

The significance of the tenth-anniversary celebrations is twofold and immense, and I urge you to reflect on them carefully. On the one hand, the Italian people, in compact and formidable masses numbering millions, have taken a decisive leap forward, and I feel, soul to soul, that I have understood them as never before. On the other hand, the doctrines, institutions, and achievements of the Black Shirt revolution are now on the agenda of every country in Europe.

For in this dark, tormented, and already faltering world, salvation can come only from the truth of Rome, and from Rome it will come.

And an entirely different series of stances and initiatives with which the Duce punctuated the years 1932–1934 fits just as well into this framework.

We need not dwell on those related to the establishment of the corporatist system, having already discussed them; it suffices to recall the most important moments, to which the regime's propaganda gave the greatest prominence: the speech on the corporative state delivered on November 14, 1933, to the National Council of Corporations; the article "1934," written for the American press and published on January 2, 1934, also in *Popolo d'Italia* (in which it was asserted that 1934 would be the year of the corporative idea in all nations); and the speech delivered on January 13, 1934, to the Senate.

Likewise, it suffices to note that during this period—and especially from the summer of '33 onward—Mussolini repeatedly contributed to the *Popolo d'Italia* with short articles and notes (generally anonymous) aimed at highlighting and mocking the fallacy of the predictions that the Italian anti-fascist press abroad was making regarding the regime's stability and its impending crisis, and at contrasting these with the divisions and controversies plaguing the exile community.

The Duce had also engaged in this kind of polemic—which suited him very well—during other periods; however, the systematic nature and frequency with which he engaged in it in 1933–34 are such that one cannot help but see a specific intent: to convince skeptics and rebels that anti-fascism was by now merely a folkloric phenomenon—a handful of fanatics with no future and out of touch with reality, destined to devour one another.

The insistence with which Mussolini, beginning in late 1932, spoke of the "universality" of fascism and an impending "fascistization" of Europe, however, deserves a somewhat longer discussion.

In reality, Mussolini had made some references to this as early as 1925–26.

In the Chamber of Deputies on November 18, 1925, he had said:

From Tokyo to New York, from north to south, on every continent, in every country, people are debating the pros and cons of fascism. And while I maintain that it is not possible to replicate fascism abroad because historical, geographical, economic, and moral conditions differ, I do assert that there are forces of life within fascism whose universal character cannot be denied.

On April 7 of the following year, he had spoken of a "new principle" to be promoted throughout the world and brought to triumph. And the year after that, in the preface to J. S. Barnes's essay, *The Universal Aspects of Fascism*, he had written:

Fascism is a purely Italian phenomenon in its historical manifestation, but its doctrinal tenets are

universal in nature. Fascism raises issues that are common to many peoples—specifically, to all peoples who have lived under and grown weary of demo-liberal regimes and the conventional lies associated with them.

And on October 27, 1930, he had been even more explicit:

Today I affirm that Fascism, as an idea, a doctrine, and a reality, is universal; Italian in its specific institutions, it is universal in spirit and could not be otherwise. The spirit is universal by its very nature.

We can therefore envision a fascist Europe—a Europe that models its institutions on the doctrines and practices of fascism. That is, a Europe that resolves, in a fascist sense, the problem of the modern state, the state of the 20th century, which is very different from the states that existed before 1789 or that were formed afterward.

Fascism today responds to needs of a universal nature.

On this same occasion, Mussolini had denied ("it is too trite; it was adapted by someone for newspaper readers who need expressions from commercial practice to understand") ever having uttered the famous phrase "Fascism is not an export commodity." In reality, he had indeed used this phrase on March 3, 1928, while speaking in the Chamber of Deputies on the South Tyrol issue. And, more importantly, he used it again—after this denial—with Ludwig, or at least allowed Ludwig to attribute it to him in the *Colloqui*. And if it became so well-known and popular, it was largely due to the publicity Ludwig's work gave it.

With his speech in Milan on October 25, 1932, however, Mussolini's statements became unambiguous, and the Duce began to speak with increasing frequency of an impending fascistization of Europe and of Italy's "mission" in this regard. In Milan, he said:

Today, with a clear conscience, I say to you, immense multitude, that the twentieth century will be the century of Fascism; it will be the century of Italian power, a century during which Italy will once again, for the third time, become the guiding force of human civilization, for outside of our principles there is no salvation—neither for individuals nor, much less, for peoples.

In ten years' time—and one can say this without claiming to be a prophet—Europe will have changed. Injustices have been committed, even against us, and above all against us.

There is nothing sadder than the task that sometimes falls to us of having to defend what has been the blood sacrifice of the entire Italian people!…

In a decade, Europe will be fascist or fascistized! The antithesis in which contemporary civilization struggles can be overcome in only one way: through the doctrine and wisdom of Rome!

And a year later, on October 28, 1933, in Rome (while *Il Popolo d'Italia* published its New Year's message to the Blackshirts—"a message… all the more severe because the Fascist revolution is not merely the privilege and endeavor of Italy, but the watchword and hope of the world") during the inauguration of the Via dei Trionfi: "These streets, not without profound significance," he said, addressing those decorated for valor, "have been inaugurated by the nation's representatives, because everything done in Rome is national and universal…"

Today, October 28 of Year XI, I wish to give you a stern, a severe, a magnificent charge: the charge of Italian supremacy.

Fascist Italy must strive for supremacy on land, at sea, in the skies, in the material world, and in the spirit. Plant this supreme certainty deep in your hearts and ensure that it becomes not only a certainty but the united will of the entire Italian people.

Even setting aside the initial contradiction between a "non-exportable" fascism and the universality of fascism, these were undoubtedly statements that today hold a clear meaning for us and—even without falling into purely a priori ideological positions—foreshadow what the developments of fascist politics would be.

At the time, however, very few in Italy grasped their prescient significance or even their dangerous ambiguity. Leaving aside for the moment the discussion of those young fascists, those magazines (especially A. Gravelli's *Antieuropa*), and those organizations (especially the CAURs) that based

their actions and hopes on fascist universalism—hoping to make it a tool for renewing and revitalizing fascism—it was by no means easy for the majority of Italians to grasp this significance.

For the masses, the point of reference could be almost exclusively Fascist foreign policy, and at that time—as we have said—it was indeed presented as a policy of prestige, but also as a policy of peace; above all, it was presented in this way by the regime's entire propaganda apparatus, which echoed the Duce when he proclaimed:

Let it be clear, however, that we are arming ourselves materially and spiritually to defend ourselves, not to attack. Fascist Italy will never take the initiative in war. Our very policy of treaty revision—which is not a recent development but has been proposed since June 1928—is aimed at avoiding war and at saving the immense costs of war. The revision of the peace treaties is not primarily an Italian interest, but a European one—indeed, a global one. It is not an absurd or unworkable proposition, since this possibility of revision is provided for in the Covenant of the League of Nations itself.

The only absurd thing is the insistence on the immutability of the treaties.

Thus, for most people, it was practically impossible to grasp the contradictions and adventurism woven into that policy. At the highest levels, many other factors were also at play.

Theories regarding the universality of the fascist concept—which had already been developed by men such as Maraviglia and Gentile—played a role. The connection that Mussolini and the regime's propaganda constantly established between corporatism—the sole means of countering the crisis of the capitalist system and averting communism—and the universality of fascism also played a role.

Above all, the fact that the discourse on the universality of fascism and its imminent triumph in Europe was closely linked to that on the empire and to that on Rome and Roman culture played a key role.

We will have ample opportunity to return to the discourse on Rome; here it suffices to recall that at this time it was presented (and above all received) essentially as a symbol of certain values and as a myth that inspired and stirred moral energies, as a reminder of an era in which Rome had been the teacher of civilization and the architect of the Pax Romana.

As for the concept of the empire, the emphasis here, too, was placed above all on its civil, moral, spiritual, and cultural aspects, while the material and territorial aspects were left vague.

A typical example is what Mussolini wrote—ideologically linking back to what he had said in 1925—on the last page of *The Doctrine of Fascism*:

The Fascist State is a will to power and dominion. The Roman tradition is, in this context, an idea of strength. In the Doctrine of Fascism, the empire is not merely a territorial, military, or commercial expression, but a spiritual and moral one. One can conceive of an empire—that is, a nation that directly or indirectly guides other nations without needing to conquer a single square kilometer of territory.

For Fascism, the tendency toward empire—that is, the expansion of nations—is a manifestation of vitality; its opposite, or insularity, is a sign of decadence. Peoples who rise or are reborn are imperialists; peoples who die are defeatists.

Fascism is the doctrine best suited to represent the tendencies and state of mind of a people such as the Italians, who are rising again after many centuries of neglect or foreign servitude.

And the Duce was echoed by a whole host of leading figures who repeated that “an empire is, first and foremost, an idea,” that “the true empire that Italy seeks is that of the spirit, that of spiritual dominion in the world,” that “the empire is, first and foremost, light; second, it is an absolute guarantee of justice for all; third, it is peace,” and—as Bodrero wrote:

the Empire is a great moral reality. Empire signifies the gift that a people bestows—after its own trials, after its own martyrdom—upon all other peoples of the earth: the gift of a great Idea that resolves a problem over which these peoples have struggled for centuries. This is the Empire to which Italy aspires, and this alone, for Italy is imperialist only in this sense.

And in light of this entire complex of events, positions taken, statements made, and their use at various levels of public opinion formation, the results of the second plebiscite of 1934 must also be viewed and evaluated.

Only by taking into account all the pieces of the mosaic—that is, all the direct and indirect motivations—is it possible to understand both the care the regime took in preparing it and its outcome.

An outcome—we repeat—that was in many ways a foregone conclusion and was undoubtedly influenced by the particular climate of repression in which it took place and by the precautions taken by the fascist regime to ensure its plebiscitary nature; yet, equally undoubtedly, on the whole reflected the genuine consensus that at that time characterized—albeit with diverse and varied motivations and sentiments—the attitude of the vast majority of Italians toward the regime and, above all, toward Mussolini.

The Chamber of Deputies was dissolved on January 19, 1934. On March 2, the Grand Council approved the list of future deputies.

On March 18, the regime's second five-year assembly was convened in Rome, before which Mussolini delivered a speech-report on Fascist policy over the past five years.

On the whole, it was a rather routine speech, in which the main aspects of Italian domestic and foreign policy were briefly summarized.

Only toward the end, after declaring the death of anti-fascism and announcing that the "traitors," the "rabble-rousers," and the "cowards" would be eliminated "without mercy," did the Duce go on to point out a new danger threatening the regime: the "bourgeois spirit"—"that is, a spirit of complacency and conformity, a tendency toward skepticism, compromise, a life of comfort, and careerism":

"The bourgeoisified fascist," he said, as if echoing the criticisms of certain fascist youth publications, "is the one who believes that there is nothing left to do, that enthusiasm is a nuisance, that there are too many parades, that it is time to settle down, that a single dream is enough, and that the comfort of home reigns supreme over all needs."

I do not rule out the existence of bourgeois temperaments, but I deny that they can be fascists. The creed of the fascist is heroism; that of the bourgeois is selfishness.

There is but one remedy against this danger: the principle of continuous revolution. This principle must be entrusted to the young—young in years and in spirit. It drives away the intellectual slackers and keeps the people's interest ever alive; it does not immobilize history, but develops its forces.

In our view, revolution is a process that alternates the drudgery of daily construction with dazzling moments of sacrifice and glory.

Amid this turmoil following the war, it is already possible to see—and will become increasingly evident—the physical and moral transformation of the Italian people.

Thus has begun the fourth great historical era of the Italian people, the one that future historians will call the era of the Black Shirts. This era will see the true Fascists—that is, those born, raised, and having lived entirely within our culture—endowed with the virtues that confer the privilege of primacy in the world.

The “votes” took place on March 25. The outcome was truly plebiscitary: voter turnout was 96.25%; votes in favor numbered 10,025,513, votes against 15,265 (the anti-fascist parties, and especially the Communists, had issued the call not to abstain but to vote “no”), and invalid and scattered votes totaled 1,219.

Eloquent proof of how closely the outcome of the “second plebiscite” reflected the reality of Italy at that time is provided by the turmoil and crisis that simultaneously arose among a significant portion of those anti-fascists who, until then, despite having remained in Italy, had not renounced their ideals (so much so that some of them had been placed under internal exile), had remained respectfully aloof from public life and, in various cases, had maintained ties with the Anti-Fascist Concentration in Paris and with the clandestine Lombard socialist group.

The stability of the regime—first the establishment of the corporatist system and then the outcome of the “elections” of March 25—in fact prompted many of these anti-fascists to reconsider both their stance toward the regime and, above all, the concrete reality in which it was now entrenched and which, at that moment, gave no reasonable grounds to believe it would change for a long time; in practice, to grapple with the question of operating loyally within the regime’s framework from within and using the tools it offered them, but, at the same time, from a socialist perspective, so as not to completely lose contact with the masses and to try to nurture the seeds of a true social revolution inherent in corporatism.

If one is to give credence to a statement on the “Caldara case” sent to Paris in June by the internal socialist center, some of these individuals, deep down, had above all remained “Mussolinian” socialists who think and say that he “has remained the same,” that he would be moving toward socialism if the socialists did not leave him alone, forcing him to rely on the bourgeoisie.

Hence their conviction that the Duce would not let their overture fall on deaf ears and would grant them a political “space” in which to operate—if not exactly as a party, then at least as an organized group.

It is difficult to say precisely who took the initiative to establish contact.

According to Faravelli, it was said among the socialists in Italy that Rossoni had “gone out of his way as an instigator, making it known that he is still a revolutionary and that the regime is moving toward socialism.”

What is certain is that the idea had been maturing for some time and that the first to conceive it had been Carlo Silvestri and Domenico Viotto—while still in internal exile—who, upon regaining their freedom, had promoted it among various socialist friends, finding widespread support especially within the group centered around the former mayor of Milan, Emilio Caldara, and Nino Levi.

On February 27, 1934, Caldara had finally turned to Carlo Missiroli, writing to him that he had decided to request a personal meeting with Mussolini and asking him to arrange it and to preview the content of his proposal, which, he added, “you know, with a few nuances, is shared by a veritable multitude.”

The request to Mussolini was forwarded to Rome on March 5 by Luigi Veratti, a socialist physician and longtime friend of the Duce, who, however, kept his remarks very general: “Attorney Caldara, together with Professor Nino Levi, are requesting a meeting with you to discuss matters of a political nature.”

The meeting took place after the “elections,” on April 18. All we know about it is what Caldara told some friends in the following weeks and what one of them reported to the authorities in Rome in a series of reports on the developments of what immediately became the “Caldara case.” One of these reports reads:

Attorney Caldara tells me that, first of all, he asked the Duce whether an old socialist, while keeping his political ideals intact, could today decide to join the corporatist movement.

The Duce replied (according to Caldara) in the affirmative and added: “Indeed, we must bear in mind that we are only at the starting point.”

Caldara said that among the old socialists, there has been a steadily growing movement of those who intend to abandon their old prejudices and collaborate with Fascism. Such collaboration, however, remains difficult, even when the will to do so exists.

Caldara says he proposed to the Duce that all the former socialist organizers join the Fascist trade unions and encourage workers who are still reluctant to do so to join. Caldara, however, says (both to me and to his comrades, to whom he reported on the conversation) that he proposed to the Duce that the former socialists, instead of swearing unconditional loyalty to Fascism, swear it to corporatism or to the Corporate State.

On this point (according to Caldara’s account), the Duce did not give him a precise answer; in fact, he did not even respond.

Caldara says he raised another point, specifically that of the minimum level of freedom that must be guaranteed to citizens, and particularly to workers.

The Duce reportedly replied, this time decisively and emphatically: “Freedom for the group, not for the individual!”

Attorney Caldara emphasized the cordial and generous manner in which he had been received and treated by the Duce (generous in that Caldara himself recalls having gone twenty years without any contact with the Duce and, indeed, having often passed him by without greeting him).

According to other accounts and reports circulating in the anti-fascist émigré press, Caldara also asked Mussolini for permission to publish a magazine.

The report is likely true; in fact, it appears that around mid-June of the following year, the group centered around the former mayor and Socialist deputy was preparing a magazine titled *Nuovo Stato*. It also seems that Mussolini inquired about the relationship between Caldara's group and the group centered around R. Rigola, *Problemi del lavoro*, suggesting that he would have welcomed an agreement between them.

Overall, however, the conversation must have been primarily exploratory in nature. Mussolini, except perhaps regarding the magazine (which never saw the light of day), did not have to commit himself in any way at that time.

This is demonstrated by the fact that on May 14, Veratti made a tentative attempt to urge him to make a decision ("it seems to me that it would be useful to support this movement, which, to tell the truth, was born… in exile!") and on June 23, Caldara himself wrote to Mussolini to "repeat a question: Can we lend our names and our efforts, each to his own union, without making political declarations and while committing to the strictest union and national discipline?"

From the context of this letter, it appears that Mussolini had asked Caldara for "a precise and comprehensive program" on the issues that corporatism would have to address, and that Caldara and his friends were preparing it for him. By this date, however, the Duce must have practically set aside the idea of pursuing the matter further.

This is evidenced by the terse note with which his private secretary, Sebastiani, replied to Caldara on August 5:

The Head of Government has not replied to your letter due to the serious preoccupations of recent days. He reserves the right to do so at a quieter time.

In those days, of course, with the Austrian question dramatically on the table, Mussolini had other things on his mind. The fact remains, however, that he never found the right moment to reply to Caldara, and when he did—through Veratti—it was to let him know that he did not consider it appropriate "for now" for Caldara and his associates to carry out "that work in support of the

corporatist movement" they had discussed in April and that, for the time being, he advised Caldara and his friends to join the unions individually and to support the work of Rigola and his group.

Given the premises from which Caldara and his friends had set out and the controversies that had since flared up around them, this advice was practically unacceptable! But Mussolini must have given it as a matter of course, with the very intent of bringing the matter to a close.

At this point, before attempting to explain Mussolini's decision, a clarification is necessary. The "Caldara affair" has generally been viewed as a politically serious episode of capitulation in the face of triumphant fascism at that time, but essentially an episode concerning only a small group of reformist socialists who represented only themselves.

This view needs to be revised. Aside from the tremendous repercussions it had abroad—which worked entirely to Mussolini's advantage—and aside from the fierce controversies it sparked among anti-fascist émigrés, the "Caldara affair" presents itself to the historian as an iceberg, the bulk of which remained unknown at the time.

In fact, it not only caused a great stir but—and this is what interests us most here—affected a far wider range of people and circles than is commonly believed.

The numerous reports and documents related to it prove that, in the months following the Mussolini-Caldara meeting, the group surrounding the former mayor of Milan had contacts with many anti-fascists from various regions of Italy—generally reformist socialists, but also former maximalists and former members of the Popular Party—who almost always approved of his initiative and pledged their support should it come to fruition.

According to this documentation, Caldara and Levi had contacts, among others, with the former mayor of Molinella, Bentivogli, as well as with Massarenti, Romita, Viotto, Schiavi, Valmaggi, Melandri, Grandi, Meda, Mauri, and with many local representatives and groups.

In mid-October, for example, Carlo Missiroli sent Mussolini a memo regarding the support that Caldara's initiative was garnering in Romagna; attached to it, for the Duce's approval, was the text of a declaration that a group of former members of the Socialist Party from the provinces of Forlì and Ravenna were asking to have their former party comrades sign.

It seems that even one of the leading Austrian socialist leaders, Ellenbogen, had expressed a favorable opinion of the initiative, most likely in the hope of a shift in Mussolini's stance toward his party.

That being the case, those who best grasped the true significance of the "Caldara affair" were not those who sought to explain it by linking it to the economic crisis, nor—much less—those who dismissed it as a capitulation or a counterrevolutionary maneuver aimed at obstructing the proletarian revolution, but rather Lelio Basso in the Paris-based *Politica socialista*:

The sensationalist controversies that have surrounded this gesture—which is to be considered all the more courageous the more "unpolitical" it is—are further proof of the poor understanding of the real situation in Italy on the part of certain circles of exiles, to whom I do not intend to respond now, partly because I consider them politically insubstantial and outdated.

One may disagree entirely with Caldara, but it is not permissible to ignore that his stance is merely one aspect of a political situation that is no longer that of 1922 or 1926.

We must, once and for all, have the courage to recognize that the dichotomies of Fascism versus Anti-Fascism and Dictatorship versus Democracy no longer hold sway in Italy, and that empty slogans of justice or freedom no longer take root…

This is not an expression of a tendency, a preference, or a desire: it is the objective observation of a factual reality… Now, in Italy, the 12 years of Fascism that have passed and the years yet to come have shaped—and will ultimately mold—a generation for whom the terms “democracy” and “liberalism” will be devoid of meaning—a generation entirely accustomed to viewing political and social problems in the terms presented by everyday reality.

The young people who today, at age 30, are gradually assuming positions of responsibility in civic and political life, in education, in journalism, and in the liberal professions, were in high school at the time of the March on Rome, and have nothing but a confused and, generally speaking, unpleasant memory of the political struggle of that era.

A similar, if not entirely identical, phenomenon can also be observed among the working class.

I do not mean by this that all Italians are fascists: far from it.

Hardly anyone believes in the regime’s “miraculous” achievements anymore—just as hardly any priest now believes in Catholic dogma—but even fewer believe in anti-fascism. The few who are convinced are perhaps only certain small groups of young missionaries of fascist syndicalism, who go around talking about social solidarity and collectivism and believe in good faith that they can achieve these goals through the experience of fascist corporatism.

For the rest of the people, fascism is now a habit, a reality—albeit an unwelcome one—that they may grumble about or laugh at from time to time, but which no one would seriously consider questioning.

To speak to Italians today of the “defense of democratic freedoms” is to speak a language they no longer understand. We must give up defending and propping up a structure that is crumbling on all sides if we truly wish to build the edifice of liberalism. And building is not possible without a mass of people to whom we can speak only of things they know, of the experiences they live through, of the problems that distress them every day—in short, of everything that has for years now formed, and will continue to form for years to come, the substance of their lives.

We must convince ourselves once and for all that fascism is a de facto reality that must be taken into account, and that it is not the problems of twenty years ago but those that fascism leaves unresolved today that can serve as the foundation from which tomorrow’s solutions will spring. Otherwise, we are merely survivors.

The defeats of social democracy on nearly every front in Europe, along with the regression of communism, finally allow us to free ourselves from dead weight, from formulas, and from clichés, so that we can truly begin a new endeavor with a realistic and open-minded spirit, completely free from nostalgia and ready-made solutions. We must rediscover Marx beneath the pseudo-Marxist encrustations of the long decades of parliamentary and democratic politics.

Beyond the “Caldara affair” lies this eager desire among socialists—who still believe in the future—to reconnect with the vast masses of youth, in a far more concrete way than through sterile clandestine propaganda, and to lead them from today’s unmet needs to the hoped-for achievements of tomorrow. For the socialist tomorrow can be nothing but the fruit and achievement of this youth.

If, beyond individual assertions—some of which are highly debatable—one bears in mind the deeper meaning of this analysis, it is possible to attempt to explain why Mussolini rejected the overtures of Caldara and his friends.

To the Duce, their support would certainly have played into his hands; in other times, he would have considered it a major prestige victory, to be trumpeted far and wide: even at that moment, it would undoubtedly have allowed him to affirm the full validity of corporatism and to provide further proof of the accuracy of his assertion that anti-fascism was now defeated.

But on the other side of the scale was the reaction within fascism—not so much that of the old intransigent faction (which made its voice heard on June 12 in the columns of *Il Regime Fascista*, though it was no longer in a position to impose vetoes) as that of the younger generation.

To these young people who advocated for a more dynamic and revolutionary fascism—and to whom he had pointed out that the bourgeois spirit was the new danger to be fought—to these young people who aspired to take fascism into their own hands to revitalize it and propel it forward, and who were chomping at the bit even in the face of the old, bourgeoisified squadristi, Mussolini could neither give the impression that achieving corporatism required thecontribution of old men from the ranks of reformism and anti-fascism—even if they had been “enlightened on the road to Damascus”—nor could he subordinate them to these men in the unions and corporative bodies; the blow would have been too severe, amounting to a declaration of failure and, at the same time, of distrust in the younger generations.

It was no coincidence that first Gravelli’s *Ottobre* (on June 9) and then, more explicitly, Berto Ricci’s *L’universale* had risen up against the prospect of an agreement with Caldara.

It is certain that a section of the bourgeoisie—as *L’universale* had written—approaches the Corporations with an anti-revolutionary mindset. This fact must be kept in mind to prevent certain positions of great strategic importance from being entrusted to men who might constitute an obstacle to the revolutionary advance.

One must not… confuse the gradual nature of corporatist developments with a reformist spirit. Gradualism is a matter of tactics, but it knows the goals to be achieved and strives toward them unwaveringly.

Reformism, on the other hand, would turn the Corporations into a useless, hybrid mess—a cross between liberalism and state socialism—in short, a palliative for the individualist economy… let us be clear about this when speaking of reformists. These enemies of the revolution are found not only among elements of the industrial, agricultural, and commercial bourgeoisie who would like to turn the Corporations into an institution for the rescue of capitalism, but also among the new converts of the intellectual bourgeoisie, coming from the pure-blooded reformism of socialism. We emphasize the terms “intellectual bourgeoisie” and “workers” because reformism was, within socialism, a typically bourgeois and intellectualistic phenomenon. Some of these gentlemen, who had long been wary of Fascism, have finally realized that it not only remains true to its principles—affirmed as far back as 1919—but goes beyond those very principles, or rather gives them the developments that different situations require. And so the gentlemen of reformism finally acknowledge that Fascism has not betrayed the social aspirations of the Italian people: so far, so good. The difficulty begins when they wish to contribute their ideas and actions to the corporatist revolution. Then we must keep a close watch on them: that is, to see whether they are coming to Fascism to accept its revolutionary and imperial substance; or whether they hope to smuggle their own conception of life and politics into our movement… We must tell them that while domestic Fascist policy in recent years has focused primarily on social issues, Fascism is not limited to these and does not aim merely at the material well-being of the people, but above all at their moral greatness. The spirituality of Fascism is the premise of its imperial conception: if the reformist bourgeoisie were to seek, through formal membership in the Corporations, to dilute the political spirit of Fascism in favor of a sociological and anti-imperial interpretation of life, we must once again invoke against them the spirit of the squadristi, which in

socialism does not fight the enemy of the bourgeoisie, but precisely the materialist conception of bourgeois origin that opposed the imperial mission of the Italian people.

At another time, perhaps, Mussolini might have ignored this sentiment and reaped all the immediate benefits the “Caldara affair” had to offer without worrying about reactions that, over time, would have subsided and been forgotten.

However, if we look at the date of the issue of *L’Universale* in which the attack on the reformists appeared—November 25, 1934—it is immediately clear that at that moment he could not so blatantly frustrate the “imperial” spirit of the Fascist youth: in those very same days, on the border between Somalia and Ethiopia, the Ual-Ual incident was unfolding—an event that would lead to the “conquest of the empire.”

It was therefore better, at that particular moment, to be content with the fruits that the “Caldara affair” had already yielded, especially abroad, in terms of propaganda, without, however, pushing the operation any further, so as not to displease anyone or tie his own hands in any way.

In light of the new, grandiose imperial objectives that his policy had set for the coming months, the “Caldara affair,” on the one hand, had by then given the Duce all it could offer, and, on the other hand, had become an almost irrelevant episode, one not worth his further attention, especially if doing so might entail the risk of obscuring, to some extent, the imperial face of Fascism and undermining the consensus of which it had ultimately been a product—a consensus that, on the eve of such a demanding challenge, needed to be strengthened rather than weakened.

This, most likely, explains his decision to cease further contact with Caldara and his friends and his invitation to them to content themselves with joining the fascist unions individually and supporting the “technical” support efforts of the Rigola group.

4. In Search of a Fascist Foreign Policy.

In the previous volumes, when we made brief mention of the fascist government’s foreign policy, it was in reference to Mussolini’s domestic policy, to the repercussions that certain aspects of the former had on the latter, or—much more often—to the way the Duce utilized it to consolidate and expand his power, especially in terms of public opinion.

In addition to a practical reason—the desirability of treating foreign policy as uniformly as possible—this choice stemmed from a very specific underlying conviction: until around 1929, foreign policy was clearly deferred and subordinated to domestic and financial policy within Mussolini’s strategy. And this was due to at least two fundamental reasons.

One was subjective: the need for Mussolini, before devoting himself to a more demanding and dynamic foreign policy, to resolve domestic issues—that is, to strengthen his power and equip it with the institutions necessary to ensure the greatest stability and the broadest possible consensus.

Another, objective reason: the stagnation of the international situation, which—even if he had wanted to—did not allow Mussolini to pursue a foreign policy different (that is, more dynamic) from the one—on the whole, essentially traditional—that he implemented during this period.

Each of these two fundamental reasons was then linked to another, each of which was at once a specific aspect and a corollary of the main one; the first was linked to what can be summarized under the broader umbrella of relations between the Fascist government and major economic forces; the second, on the other hand, stemmed from the different ways in which various foreign governments judged the Fascist regime as such and, therefore, their own relations with it, both in the immediate term and, above all, over the long term, given that in matters of international relations, differing political structures and ideological differences obviously had very little impact on day-to-day relations but could have a much greater impact when the focus shifted from routine diplomacy to major international issues and their resolution for the future.

The issue of how relations between the Fascist government and major economic forces influenced Fascist foreign policy in the 1920s has been addressed primarily by Carocci, who highlighted its essential elements:

His analysis clearly shows that, for the majority of Italian economic circles at the time, foreign policy was viewed as “a more distant issue” and, for them, less vital than matters related to domestic, economic, and labor policy. What truly mattered to them was being able to increase exports of goods, despite the growing difficulties in international trade, and to defend themselves against international cartels. Beyond these two objectives, the foreign policy favored by the dominant economic forces was one of cooperation with the great powers, with whom trade was most extensive; but, also because exports to those markets were shrinking, they sought to expand into the markets of the Danube, Balkan, and Mediterranean regions, and favored, in these areas, a policy of prestige and strength that would indirectly facilitate economic penetration, provided it did not exceed the bounds of cooperation with the other powers.

From this perspective, Italian industry was particularly interested in maintaining good political relations with France, both because—unlike German industry—French industry did not compete with it, and because important Italian industrial sectors (primarily the steel industry, due to its reliance on scrap iron) depended heavily on French exports. The same can be said of Yugoslavia, although the economic motivations were obviously different.

By contrast, virtually all foreign investments were generally considered too risky or not very profitable (starting with those in Ethiopia, which the government had urged in vain), so that among businessmen and major banking institutions there was widespread reluctance to venture down that path “without

rock-solid financial guarantees, which the government—in an effort to curb rising public spending—was not always willing, in turn, to provide."

This led to a series of resistances and frictions that rightly prompted Carocci to speak of "a political initiative that lacked the full and convinced support of the major economic forces" and that was by them "more accepted than spontaneously favored"—and at times even considered a price to be paid to the regime in exchange for the advantages it assured them in domestic, economic, and labor union policy.

Given this reality, it is clear that—even setting aside the other reasons mentioned—Mussolini, up until 1929—that is, until the Italian economy began to recover from the crisis linked to the "quota ninety" policy and, above all, the regime had not largely freed itself from the major economic powers and had not concretely asserted the primacy of politics over the economy—could not have pursued a foreign policy substantially different from the one he did, much less could he have imbued it with a more aggressive and openly imperialistic character.

A character that, moreover, it did not fully assume even in the years immediately following 1929, when—with the onset of the "Great Depression"—the common thread linking Italian foreign policy and economic policy increasingly became the effort to create privileged markets for the Italian economy in the Danube-Balkan region.

As for the other issue—that of the assessment and, consequently, the underlying attitude of various governments toward the Fascist regime—even though no systematic study exists on this subject, there is no doubt that it, too, had an impact on Mussolini's foreign policy (on his credibility with other governments and on his room for maneuver) that cannot be underestimated. This impact varied depending on the period, but, on closer inspection, it was—even if at first glance this may seem paradoxical—greater above all in the first decade, when Fascist Italy appeared less dangerous and Fascism was seen as an Italian rather than a European phenomenon, than in the subsequent decade, since during the period under consideration, the stability of the international situation and the lack of a genuine countervailing force to the Versailles system made it less necessary not only to accept Fascist Italy's claims to be regarded and treated as a true great power but even to seek its friendship on a permanent basis.

The formation of Mussolini's government in 1922 had not generally been met with excessive alarm by the ambassadors accredited to Rome and their respective governments. For some, anything was ultimately better than the succession of weak and vacillating governments that had until then characterized Italian political life. Others were convinced that Italy's difficult domestic situation would, for a time, absorb all the energies of the new prime minister, and they were inclined to believe both the Duce's "normalizing" intentions and the assurances of Contarini and Mussolini himself that the statements about the "new" Fascist foreign policy—written in the newspapers and shouted in the squares—were one thing, and the actual policy that Fascism, once in power, would pursue were two different things. Even those who viewed Fascism with some sympathy—convinced that it had prevented Italy from falling into the hands of Bolshevism—were all more or less aware of the possibility of a radical shift in Italian politics toward nationalism.

As Rumi wrote, referring to the first months following the "March on Rome":

There is no nostalgia for the parliamentary Italy of the immediate postwar period. Contarini—the figure with whom foreign diplomats have the most frequent contact—fulfills his role as "moderator," but he, too, appears eager to achieve something and is at times a bit querulous; here he is, harping again on the disappointments suffered by Italy, from the days of the Triple Alliance onward… But the discussion centers on Mussolini. Grandi notes the resemblance to… Napoleon, while German diplomats observe his imperial posturing and pretensions with irony (and some concern). In Italian politics, first and foremost, the style has changed, and the evidence is abundant and striking.

But there is immediately something more to it. The restored order is already taking the form of overwhelming power, fascist oppression, and the progressive identification of the party with the state; the opposition, uncertain and divided, appears in any case incapable of reversing the course of events.

All the more so, in the realm of foreign policy, diplomats harbor no illusions. The "nothing for nothing" approach, the obsession with avoiding "clean hands," and the desire for expansion are clearly evident in their correspondence…. Once again, the familiar focal points of Fascist Mediterranean aspirations reappear—from the Dodecanese to the Levant to Africa—and certain overtures to Croatian nationalists, as well as to extremists in Hungary and Bavaria, do not go unnoticed either. Of course, there is no shortage of hasty or imprecise judgments at times; convenient simplifications and the forcing of Italy's complex reality into the usual frameworks of diplomatic circles abound. But the consequences, the new developments, and the dangers of "fascism" in power are grasped with immediacy and effectiveness.

A typical example in this regard is a lengthy report by R. Graham to Lord Curzon dated June 7, 1923. Italian-British relations, observed the British ambassador in Rome, were "entirely excellent": "we are not only respected but welcome here, both individually and as a nation"; Italy was at that time perhaps the only major continental country to which such a statement could truly apply.

However, this should not obscure the fact that "Italian foreign policy is not based on principles similar to those guiding that of His Majesty's government. It is frankly opportunistic and self-serving."

"At the present time," Mussolini "is well-intentioned in working with us, for reasons of both sympathy and self-interest"; however, he aimed above all to "manipulate" international issues for domestic political gain and to secure advantages that would strengthen his position; thus, it could not be ruled out that, if he failed to obtain them, he might change—or be forced to change—his position and "turn elsewhere."

On top of this already cautious overall assessment—and in some cases, if not exactly concerned, at least suspicious—the Corfu affair and the Matteotti murder had had the effect of adding fuel to the fire, sparking a nearly universal outcry against fascism and Mussolini.

A Foreign Office memorandum dated September 18, 1923, states:

The recent seizure of Corfu and the defiance of the League of Nations are too recent to require comment. He recognizes no law other than his own will, and he is a danger to Europe and to Italy. The problem is that, despite his power, he struggles to control his own actions. He has stirred up an enthusiasm he can no longer control, and he lacks both the strength and the ability to turn Italy's thoughts toward peace and reflection, which are its only hope for the future.

This was a telling assessment, one that had most likely been influenced by the one made a few days earlier by Kennard, the chargé d'affaires in Rome: "He must be regarded rather as a rabid dog that can do infinite harm before he is finished off," an assessment that, however, also contains a very significant observation (in itself and coming from the pen of an avowedly anti-fascist diplomat) for understanding the subsequent stance of various governments regarding the Matteotti murder and its repercussions on Italian political life:

One might consider it preferable to deliver the coup de grâce to the rabid dog without delay, but one should not forget that if Mussolini were to fall, he would not simply be replaced by some other prime minister like Giolitti, but this could result in a period of anarchy that would be followed by a military dictatorship or some other, even worse form of government.

Since this was an internal Italian matter, the Matteotti murder was not officially supposed to affect diplomatic relations with Italy. Moreover, any interference in Italian internal affairs would inevitably have led to a deterioration in relations with Rome—something everyone wanted to avoid, if only to prevent some other, more unscrupulous government from taking advantage of the situation to secure a preferential relationship with Mussolini. Significant in this regard is the behavior of the British Labour government, which hastened to declare that it had no intention of creating difficulties in Anglo-Italian relations and that it did not share the interpretation of a condemnation of Mussolini's actions that had been attributed to a motion approved (with the participation of various ministers) by the Labour Party; on the contrary, as MacDonald told the House of Commons, the agenda item in question was in harmony with Mussolini's own statements and with his intentions to bring justice; equally significant was the unscrupulousness with which the Soviet embassy in Rome behaved at the height of the "Matteotti crisis," even offering a luncheon in honor of Mussolini.

That said, it must also be noted that—beyond the formal aspects—the Matteotti murder and the political crisis that followed had a significant influence on the substance of international relations as well. In a certain sense, in fact, they contributed significantly to dispelling the initial uncertainties and doubts and—combined with the reactions sparked by the Corfu affair—to shaping that judgment of Italy and fascism which, for several years—and in some cases for the entire duration of Mussolini's regime—would shape the attitudes and policies toward them of many diplomats and politicians upon

whom the foreign policy of the most important European countries directly or indirectly depended.

An attitude that—to put it as simply as possible—oscillated between two extremes. At one of these poles were those (numerous above all in France and, to a certain extent, in Germany—especially in circles close to Stresemann—and also present in some smaller countries, such as Czechoslovakia) who emphasized essentially the anti-democratic and nationalist character of Fascism, would have welcomed its fall with joy (and, in some cases, believed it was not far off), looked favorably upon non-communist exile movements, and regarded Fascist Italy as an element of the international landscape that could not be relied upon for a policy of stability and peace, given its ambitions, the purely instrumental nature of its political initiatives and stances, the Duce's fickleness, and his constant pursuit of successes to be exploited for propaganda purposes. Ideologically and politically opposed to fascism on principle, they viewed every Italian political initiative with suspicion and tended to place Mussolini in a position where he would have to align himself with the policies of the major democratic powers in a substantially subordinate role and with virtually no concessions in return.

This was all the more true because, for many of them, hostility toward the Duce's diplomatic "maneuvers" and his proclaimed desire to conduct a foreign policy inspired by the "national interest" and the principle of do ut des was combined with a negative "historical" assessment of pre-fascist foreign policy as well, so that, even before Hitler came to power in Germany, they essentially shared Herriot's view that Italy was—to use a diplomatic euphemism—"a capricious beauty" who could be showered with gifts and might grant her favors for a time, but who offered no guarantee that she would not suddenly change her mind and, therefore, "the trouble is that, in the event of war, you will find Italy on the opposite side from the one it maintained during peacetime."

Of course, over time, some of these individuals—Paul-Boncour being a typical example—while remaining steadfast in their anti-fascism, would have considered and sought to implement a policy of friendship with Fascist Italy; however, it was necessity rather than conviction that drove them, with all the consequences that such an attitude entailed.

At the other extreme were those (numerous, especially among British conservatives) who judged fascism "realistically."

Among them, true pro-fascists were very few, even though, in general, all were convinced that it was thanks to fascism that the "red dragon" had been crushed, and they considered it an "interesting" and "bold" experiment—and, in a certain sense, one worthy of success for Italy—even if they would never have accepted it in their own countries.

For all of them, in fact, Fascism was a strictly Italian phenomenon, suited—if not necessary—for a people like the Italians, with a wholly unique historical tradition and still essentially backward and politically immature for democracy (as Giolittism and the Aventine Crisis had demonstrated), especially during a time of severe crisis such as the one through which Mussolini had come to power.

Typical in this regard—especially when one considers the particular circumstances in which it was uttered (a visit to Rome)—is the assessment of fascism given by W. Churchill in January 1927:

Different nations have different ways of doing the same thing. Terms and words are often misleading. The values and meanings attributed to words differ greatly from country to country. No political issue

can be judged independently of its own atmosphere and context. If I had been Italian, I am sure I would have stood entirely with you from the beginning to the end of your victorious struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism.

But in England we have not yet had to face this danger with the same deadly force. We have our own particular way of doing things.

But of one thing I have not the slightest doubt: that we will succeed in strangling communism in our struggle against it.

Moreover, this was a people whose character had but a single stable trait—opportunism—and who, while easily aroused, were just as quick to forgive and forget. Thus, in the final analysis, to quote a judgment by Ambassador Graham from July 1925, in Italy “all governments have either been dictatorships or have been inefficient.”

Of course, even as a strictly Italian phenomenon—and therefore not to be judged by the standards of more civilized nations or classical democratic regimes—fascism was not without flaws or dangers even in their eyes.

Among the former, the most irritating—especially for the British—was probably its claim to make Italy assume the role of a true great power. Among the latter, the most serious, just as likely, was the fact that within fascism, alongside the moderates, there were extremists from whom one could expect anything, both domestically and, more importantly, on the international stage.

It was precisely this awareness of the danger and the realistic conviction that Fascism was destined to remain in power for a long time (combined with the fear that its eventual fall might be followed by something even worse) that largely accounted for the attention and sympathy with which Mussolini was viewed in these circles; he was considered almost unanimously to be the only one capable of controlling and mediating Fascism, to win over popular support, and, ultimately, a moderate.

Hence, for them, the opportunity to pursue a policy of friendship with Italy that would serve simultaneously to take advantage of Italian support as needed, to avoid putting Mussolini in a difficult position vis-à-vis the more extremist factions within his party, and to grant him the recognition and satisfaction necessary to avoid irritating him and causing him to abandon his moderate policy, but all of this—and herein lay the illusion and the internal contradiction of this position—without actually recognizing his claim to be regarded, not merely in words, as the representative of a truly great power, with all that the recognition of such a position inevitably entailed in practical terms regarding the realignment of international power; that is, a power that, in concrete terms, was ultimately still measured essentially in territorial terms, especially for a country like Italy that had no major capital to export and was not economically capable—even if, paradoxically, such resources had been guaranteed—of maintaining genuine “hunting grounds” in Europe.

Before moving on to examine the fundamental principles of Mussolini's foreign policy, it is necessary to address another preliminary issue. A question that frequently arises in scholarly literature on the Fascist period—and which has been raised with particular vigor in recent years under the influence of research conducted in Germany on National Socialist policy in general and Hitler's policy in particular—concerns whether or not it is possible to speak of a "Mussolinian program" Mussolini's foreign policy "program" and, consequently, to explain the evolution of Fascist foreign policy according to lines and timelines of development that correspond to a substantially unified political design, rationally pursued with a view to achieving specific objectives.

To answer this question, the first observation that seems necessary to make is this: not only did Mussolini never write or say anything that could even remotely be compared, in terms of "political theory" and "program of action," to *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's so-called *Secret Book*, but it can even be ruled out that he had a foreign policy program when he came to power in October 1922.

Certainly—as we have seen in the previous volumes—as a journalist and politician, Mussolini had shown a keen interest in international affairs and had written and spoken extensively on them, especially regarding issues of peace and the conflicts between Italy and its allies.

By early 1922, this interest had, in a certain sense, become more systematic and in-depth. However, as a political strategist and a profound connoisseur of the psychology and moods of the masses, Mussolini—up until the "March on Rome"—had regarded foreign policy as an element that was demagogically very important but, on closer inspection, secondary to his political strategy. It was an element that had undoubtedly helped pave his way to power by winning him a range of "patriotic" and "nationalist" sympathies, but which had not required him (except in the case of the Treaty of Rapallo) to take concrete stances or formulate programs that went beyond the generic—albeit high-sounding— demand for a new international position for Italy and redress for the "injustices" suffered—and, above all, that would entail even a tentative choice among the various alternatives, demands, and programs that were constantly being put forward in the "nationalist" sphere, in the columns of the countless fascist and para-fascist newspapers and periodicals, and in *Il Popolo d'Italia* itself. This, in our view, is an important point to bear firmly in mind if one does not wish to overestimate and mistake as manifestations and trends of a nonexistent fascist (or, worse, Mussolini-style) foreign policy program (whereas, at most, it can only be considered the echo of a state of mind and a sense of unease as confused as they were unrealistic) the jumble of writings and pamphlets published in the period leading up to the "March on Rome" by authors who represented only themselves or groups lacking any real influence over Mussolini—and whom he completely ignored, limiting himself to reaping the immediate political benefits they provided him. During this period, in fact, not only did Mussolini lack a foreign policy program, but he also viewed foreign policy issues solely in terms of domestic politics and his efforts to become its arbiter; that is, a role consisting, on the one hand, of agitation and propaganda—and thus proselytizing—and, on the other hand, of polemics and differentiation from the foreign policies of the various Giolitti, Bonomi, and Facta governments.

This explains why he, too, would sometimes go so far as to say that at the time of the "March on Rome" there was no Fascist foreign policy program, and to write things that were not only internally contradictory but also divorced from any reality—even the most fervently "Fascist" one.

Denying the existence of a foreign policy "program" does not, however, obviously mean that before the "March on Rome," there were not already at work within Mussolini certain states of mind, cultural motivations, and convictions (some characteristic of him, others a product of the milieu in which he

moved) that would play a decisive role in shaping his conception of international relations and his understanding of the place Italy should occupy among nations.

In summary, it can be said that even at this early stage, he viewed international relations through what might be called a Darwinian lens, both with regard to the lives of peoples and states and to the balance of power that determined and governed them.

For Mussolini, imperialism was “the eternal and immutable law of life.”

“It,” he wrote as early as the beginning of 1919, “is, after all, nothing more than the need, the desire, and the will to expand, which every living and vital people possesses. It is the means by which imperialism is exercised, and what distinguishes one form of imperialism from another, both in individuals and in peoples.” Imperialism is not, as is commonly believed, necessarily aristocratic and military. It can be democratic, peaceful, economic, or spiritual.

As for pacifism, it was a myth that was not only unworkable and dangerous but absurd, since, by denying struggle—“which is the origin of all things”—it effectively denied the progress and dynamism of both individuals and nations. On this point (as on his rejection of neutralism, which he considered an abdication of the ability to shape events and a resignation to passively enduring them), Mussolini remained unwavering, both before and after the “March on Rome,” in good times and bad.

“Struggle is the origin of all things because life is full of contrasts,” he proclaimed in Trieste on September 20, 1920:

there is love and hate, black and white, day and night, good and evil; since these contrasts do not balance each other out, struggle will always lie at the heart of human nature, as a supreme inevitability. And besides, it is good that it should be so. It may take the form of economic warfare or a battle of ideas; but the day when there were no longer any struggles would be a day of melancholy, of the end, of ruin. Now, that day will never come. Precisely because history always presents itself as a shifting panorama. If one were to demand a return to calm, to peace, to tranquility, one would be fighting against the current trends of this dynamic era. We must prepare for other surprises, for other struggles. There will be no period of peace until peoples surrender to a Christian dream of universal brotherhood and are able to reach out across oceans and mountains. For my part, I do not place too much faith in these ideals, but I do not rule them out because I do not rule out anything: everything is possible, even the impossible and the absurd. But today, as it stands, it would be fallacious, dangerous, and criminal to build our homes on the fragile sand of the Christian-Socialist-Communist international.

These ideals are respectable, but they are also very far from reality.

And after the “March on Rome” on February 6, 1923, speaking in the Chamber of Deputies during the approval of the Washington Naval Treaty, he reiterated this conviction:

I confess that I do not believe in perpetual peace; I think not even Kant believed in it: he had taken as the title of his book the name of a tavern sign—the sign depicted a cemetery. It is clear that in cemeteries there is perpetual peace; but among peoples, despite the preaching, despite the respectable idealism, there are facts of life called race, called development, called the greatness and decline of peoples, and these lead to conflicts, which are often resolved through the force of arms.

And, as we have seen in the relevant section, he expressed himself in essentially the same terms years later in *The Doctrine of Fascism*. Mussolini's conception of international relations stemmed almost entirely from this assessment of pacifism and neutralism and from the concept of imperialism that lay at its root: for Mussolini, from a "realistic" perspective, international relations had to be experienced and resolved over time, in parallel with the awareness that peoples were capable of acquiring regarding these relations and their own historical function; International institutions, treaties, and alliances between states, in fact, derived their value and durability from this awareness and from the ability of individual peoples to use them as instruments to enshrine their rights and assert their vitality—and thus their will to achieve moral and material hegemony.

As for Italy in particular, one point must be made very clear. There is no doubt that Mussolini believed at this time that Italy's victory at Versailles had been mutilated and that it should therefore strive to obtain a revision of the terms imposed on it by its allies; nor is there any doubt that, when considering where Italy should extend its hegemony, he was already looking primarily to the Mediterranean and to Africa in particular.

However, we do not believe that the core of his position—or, if you will, the innermost justification he gave for Italian imperialism—should be sought so much (or, at least, solely) in this, albeit strong, aspiration to obtain redress for the "injustices" suffered at Versailles, but rather in his conviction that the war of 1915–18 had begun to instill in Italians—especially the younger generations—a different sense of self and a "new national sensibility," which Fascism was to encourage, spread, and bring to fruition both domestically (hence the myth of "Fascist civilization") and abroad (hence the other key myth of Fascism, that of the new "Empire of Rome").

Typical in this regard is the following passage from one of his articles from late 1918 (written, therefore, before the myth of the "mutilated victory" took hold):

The old generation that took pleasure in the policy of "staying close to home"—that almost took delight in presenting to foreigners a discreet, modest, unassuming "little Italy" content to play the role of hostess—this generation, which was lambasted by Carducci, is dead. The men of my generation, even when they profess to be universalists, socialists, or internationalists, are "nationalists" in the best sense of the word. We—I'm speaking of those between the ages of twenty and thirty—are passionate advocates of Italian identity. We feel in our veins, in our very core, the dynamism of Italy. We are working for a greater Italy, both within and beyond its borders. It is the war that has revealed us to

ourselves. We will not go too far with these sentiments, because our innate sense of balance and proportion prevents us from slipping into either imitation or caricature. But this is the essence of the Italian soul…

Unless one fully grasps this range of sentiments, cultural motivations, and convictions that Mussolini had developed in the years leading up to his rise to power, one risks failing to understand his foreign policy—perhaps as far back as the Spanish Civil War, when the policy of "national interests" rapidly lost ground to that of "ideological interests," certainly until 1929–1930, when the first real shift in Mussolini's foreign policy since October 1922 took place.

Mussolini's rise to power undoubtedly marked a change in style in Italian foreign policy; in substance, however, it changed far less than is often claimed, and as for his "agenda," it is absolutely out of the question that Mussolini had any other objectives than to exploit foreign policy issues to consolidate his political position and domestic power.

If there was a period in Italy when foreign policy was completely subordinated to and instrumentalized for domestic politics, that period was certainly the one that began with the "March on Rome." Nor should this come as a surprise when one considers the political, economic, and labor union problems that Mussolini had to face in the years immediately following his rise to power in order to maintain, expand, and stabilize his rule.

We might almost say that, up until 1929, Mussolini was more concerned—rather than with having a foreign policy of his own—with the echoes and repercussions that the image of Fascist foreign policy he had established in Italy evoked among Italians, with the support it garnered for him (both directly and by deflecting and offsetting certain tensions and dissatisfactions arising from domestic realities), and of the possibility of exploiting them to demand of the country, in the name of Italy's greatness, "iron discipline," "a single national will," and "totalitarian" support for the regime that was taking shape.

Hence a foreign policy that was presented as aimed above all at reaffirming "Italy's dignity in the world" and at achieving "perfect equality" with respect to the other great powers, to pursue only "the national interest," and to do "nothing for nothing"—and which, to this end, required a steady stream of initiatives demonstrating its dynamism and new spirit, as well as immediate successes that would prove "in fact" the new place that Fascism claimed to have secured for Italy in the world.

A foreign policy that, in some cases (especially the Corfu affair) caused Italy considerable difficulties and at times even misled experienced foreign diplomats regarding Mussolini's true intentions, creating an atmosphere of mistrust around him that provided strong arguments to those who—especially in France—tended to view relations with Italy not so much in terms of relations between states as in terms of the conflict between fascism and democracy.

A foreign policy—once again—that, as is well known, led more than a few to describe it as essentially the result of improvisation and inconsistency aimed at purely demagogic and propagandistic objectives.

Salvemini's assessment is typical in this regard:

Mussolini attached no importance to the international treaties he concluded: he signed them, forgot about them, and did as he pleased when he found them inconvenient.

What he sought were immediate successes—it mattered little whether they were real or apparent, fleeting or lasting—that would serve to dazzle "the so-called masses," that is, allow the newspapers he had bought off in Italy and abroad to sing his praises.

Today, in light of the diplomatic documents that have come to light and the new studies they have made possible, such a judgment is no longer acceptable. While it is indeed undisputed that Italian foreign policy during those years was essentially geared toward Mussolini's domestic policy and thereby took on certain very specific characteristics, it is difficult to assert—without confusing the style deliberately imposed on it by Mussolini and the image that fascist propaganda presented of it (especially for domestic consumption) with its substance—that for that reason alone it was improvised and incoherent.

On the contrary, it seems to us that one can say that, beyond the new style and the inevitable negative consequences (though not irreparable—see relations with England after the Corfu crisis, regarding which one must by no means forget the remarkable benefits the Duce derived from it on the domestic front) that it produced, and the demagogic use Mussolini made of it for domestic purposes, and beyond the uncertainties and weaknesses that, just as inevitably, stemmed from the inability to completely disregard that amalgam of diverse sentiments, competing and opposing demands, and conflicting pressures that the war had reawakened or provoked within the state, as well as within the nation and society," Italian foreign policy during these years was, on the whole and in its own way, cautious and reasonable—enough to account for the assessment given many years later, to cite just one example, by U.S. Secretary of State Stimson:

Mussolini "was, in those years, a responsible and useful leader in foreign policy, no more aggressive in his nationalism than many democratic statesmen."

A policy that—except in the case of relations with Yugoslavia—avoided succumbing to the influences driving certain groups and certain nationalist or ultra-fascist-leaning publications (whom Mussolini, significantly, did not prevent from trumpeting their agendas, but whom he essentially disregarded and kept at a distance from Palazzo Chigi)—on which people have all too often relied to reconstruct a fascist "foreign policy program" that in reality did not exist; a policy that largely continued along the traditional lines of pre-fascist foreign policy; and that when (in 1926–27) it embarked on the path of

revisionism—on the one hand, as usual, for domestic purposes (to present itself as the leader of the revisionist countries) but on the other hand, to quote Guariglia, to try to recreate “that possibility of maneuvering that has traditionally been advantageous to us” —it did so, on closer inspection, with caution, without pushing its luck too far.

While it is debatable whether this policy was merely transitional in nature—imposed by the international situation and Italy’s domestic circumstances, as we believe—and whether it served the fascist political system or merely reflected Mussolini’s personal political strategy, it is, in our view, beyond doubt that not only during these years but always, Mussolini ruled out the possibility of a conflict in Europe in order to achieve local successes in the name of revisionism.

Setting aside every other argument (and many could be put forward), this is demonstrated by the absence during this period of any serious commitment to military preparedness.

That said—let this be clear—nothing could be further from our intention than to claim that Mussolini absolutely ruled out the idea of a war—whether localized, that is, essentially colonial, or intra-European—through which to assert Italian power. On the contrary, he was convinced that both would occur. This was based both on what we might call his overall assessment of the European situation and on his conviction that, without the use of force, the other great powers would never consent to a substantial strengthening of Italy, and, finally, for ideological reasons. Mussolini, as we have seen, not only did not believe in “lasting, perpetual, everlasting peace,” but was convinced that war was a “phenomenon that accompanies the development of humanity.” A phenomenon that was at the same time “the tragic fate that weighs upon man,” for which “war is to man as motherhood is to woman,” and “the court of cassation among peoples.”

Just as “it is only action that tempers the soul,” so, in fact, only war brings all human energies to their peak and imprints a seal of nobility on the peoples who have the virtue to face it. All other trials are substitutes, which never force a man to confront himself in the face of the choice between life and death.

We wish only to maintain that in the 1920s, Mussolini was not yet able to foresee, even vaguely, the era of these wars.

The reference in the Ascension Day speech to the years 1935–1940 as “a crucial juncture in European history” in which Italy could have made its voice heard and would have seen its “rights” “finally” recognized has, in our view, been substantially misunderstood: by this, Mussolini was not referring to the outbreak of a new European crisis of a warlike nature, but to a series of international deadlines (linked to the Treaty of Versailles and the Washington Naval Treaty) that he was convinced would reinvigorate the European situation and trigger an arms race (particularly tense between Italy and France).

And in the early 1930s—and even into the mid-1930s, by which time the German threat had become clear—he made the mistake of continuing to believe that war was not imminent and that it would most likely be fought by the next generation.

This was a grave error that can be partly explained by an overestimation—shared, incidentally, by many foreign observers and politicians—of the time it would take for Hitler’s Germany to feel ready to take action and carry out its aggressive policy; however, we believe it must also be explained in psychological terms.

As we have seen at length in the previous chapters, after the early years of the regime, Mussolini had quickly come to the conviction that, although Fascism had opened up and pointed out a path and a goal for Italy, Italians lacked the “character” necessary to be truly Fascist and were practically incapable of following that path and reaching that goal.

In this situation—as we have seen—it seemed to the Duce that the only thing left to do was to transform the Italian people and, above all, to create new generations—more numerous, physically and morally stronger, and truly fascist—who were genuinely capable of “daring” and taking action.

Hence his tendency to project all his most ambitious and grandiose plans—those that were meant to enshrine Fascism in history—into the medium and long term, even beyond his own physical existence.

From this perspective, it is clear that a localized colonial war was conceivable for Mussolini even in the short term, but not so a major inter-European conflict, for which he was convinced that not only the necessary technical preparation was required, but also the moral preparation and that “virtue” which determine victory or defeat and make war a “comparative test” in which peoples reveal their flaws and their capabilities.

This, it seems to us, helps explain—precisely from a psychological standpoint—why Mussolini erred in believing that war would not break out in Europe for many years to come. In addition to this consideration—in order to fully assess the framework within which Mussolini (and, along with him, the majority of his closest collaborators in this field) would have situated the long-term goals of his foreign policy in the 1930s (a framework that, incidentally, had already begun to take shape in the second half of the 1920s; recall Guariglia’s telling assessment, cited earlier, regarding revisionist policy)— it seems essential to follow this up—in order to obtain as complete a picture as possible of the basic components of Mussolini’s foreign policy—with another discussion concerning the alliances Mussolini envisioned for the future inter-European war, given that, obviously, a conflict of such importance and magnitude could be faced by Italy only within the framework of a large-scale alliance.

Well, although this may perhaps come as a surprise to those who are still bound by one of the various simplistic characterizations of Fascist policy, our conviction is that—not only up to the “Pact of Steel” but up until the spring of 1940, up until the great German military victories in the West— Mussolini, despite everything, never made a truly definitive choice, but left the issue open (or, rather, deluded himself into thinking he was leaving it open), believing he could thus choose the side most advantageous to him and, in the meantime, reap the benefits that such flexibility afforded him.

This political strategy—once again—is certainly open to much debate, both in terms of its supposed realism and its adherence to the much-vaunted fascist ethic; yet it is difficult—even with all due historical distinctions—to consider it entirely outside the political tradition of pre-fascist Italy and, in particular, of what has been defined as the traditional Italian penchant for “waltz-like” politics.

If one does not allow oneself to be influenced by the Corfu incident (undoubtedly serious and which, as noted, contributed significantly to reinforcing initial mistrust and fears toward Fascism in many foreign circles, but which remained, precisely, an isolated incident) and if one realistically assesses certain minor, marginal episodes, the first phase of Mussolini’s foreign policy—the one that concluded with the Locarno Pact and Contarini’s resignation as secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—can be considered distinct from that of previous liberal-democratic governments, above all in terms of style; otherwise, despite some minor adjustments, it essentially followed in the tradition of the Consulta

and, in any case, appears to have been guided by the desire to avoid reckless ventures and extremism, to ensure that Fascism was viewed as respectable, and to avert the danger of Italy's international isolation.

Mussolini personally took over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but continued to rely not only on Contarini—whose political views were not far removed from those of the more responsible nationalists—but also on men such as Romano Avezzana (appointed ambassador to Paris), who were certainly not pro-fascists.

At the very beginning, as we have said, he even showed a willingness not to accept Carlo Sforza's resignation. The "fascistization" of the ministry began only with the appointment of Dino Grandi as undersecretary in May 1925 and, at least to some extent, was decided upon to partially satisfy the hardline wing of the PNF, which was agitating over the presence at Palazzo Chigi of too many "anti-fascists and defeatists."

With the valuable assistance (and, in some respects, under the guidance) of these experienced diplomats, Mussolini—while imposing his own style and certainly not failing to assert his personality and impose certain specific adjustments of his own on their vision of the fundamental principles of Italian foreign policy—launched a policy that had nothing to do with what the ultra-fascists and the most ardent nationalists would have wanted.

It was no coincidence that one of his very first acts as foreign minister was to warn the Fiume fascists against attempting reckless moves that would harm the "national cause."

A collaboration thus developed between the Duce and the "careerist" that, while not always easy or free of turbulence (as in the case of Corfu), is difficult to deny or reduce—as was argued for a time—to a sort of tutelage of Mussolini by Contarini.

Nor should this come as a surprise. Deep down, Mussolini undoubtedly shared many of his party's aspirations. Although he was far less anti-French than the majority of Fascists—both because certain "Jacobin-Risorgimento" sentiments persisted in him despite everything, and above all because of his deep-seated fear of Germany—he certainly shared their vision of Italy's future in the Mediterranean (but not in Anatolia) and, above all, in Africa; likewise, his anti-Yugoslav prejudice was deeply ingrained; nor, probably, was he insensitive to certain pan-Italianist sentiments, which were already quite widespread at the time.

As has been noted, his conviction that Italy was, should act, and should be treated as a great power, equal to France and England, was particularly intense.

As a realist politician, however, he realized that the domestic and international situation left him only a very narrow, almost predetermined scope for action: time would work in his favor, but in the meantime it was necessary to avoid missteps, not to isolate Italy, and to establish it as a responsible, peaceful great power—even if it was under no obligation to conceal in the slightest that it had claims against and intended to secure compensation from the allies of 1915–18; and all of this while always keeping two requirements firmly in mind: the need to secure favorable positions in advance for the moment when the situation would allow for a more dynamic policy, and the need to always be able to play the foreign policy card in domestic politics: to demonstrate that fascism signified a new position and a new standing for Italy in the world, and that it had the capacity to achieve what previous liberal-democratic governments had failed to attain—but, at the same time, without causing the country to fear that its

policy might entail the risk of war and without overly frustrating the expectations of his party.

A delicate balance that—save for the Corfu incident—a minor misstep that was somewhat his "Matteotti affair" of foreign policy but which, ultimately, he weathered quite well, even reaping some positive results from it, certainly on the domestic front and probably on the international stage as well—he navigated with remarkable skill.

As far as domestic affairs are concerned, Mussolini's speeches from this period are extremely revealing of these concerns. The theme of peace is a recurring one in them and is always accompanied by those of prestige, dignity, and the autonomy of Fascist foreign policy vis-à-vis that of the other great powers. They appear as early as his first presidential address to the Chamber of Deputies, delivered on November 16, 1922:

We cannot afford the luxury of a policy of senseless altruism or complete devotion to the designs of others. Do ut des.

Today's Italy matters, and it must be given its due weight. This is beginning to be recognized even beyond our borders; we do not have the bad taste to exaggerate our power, but neither do we wish, out of excessive and useless modesty, to diminish it.

My formula is simple: nothing for nothing. Whoever wants concrete proof of friendship from us must first provide such proof of concrete friendship.

Fascist Italy, just as it has no intention of tearing up treaties, so too—for many political, economic, and moral reasons—has no intention of abandoning its wartime Allies.

And they recur regularly in subsequent speeches. These two quotations, taken from the speech delivered in the Senate on June 8, 1923, serve as examples:

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Italian foreign policy, while seeking to safeguard national interests, also aims to serve as a force for balance and peace in Europe. I believe that, with this policy, I am reflecting the aspirations and needs of the Italian people.

The other is from the speech delivered in the Chamber of Deputies on November 15, 1924:

What has been the premise of my foreign policy? The premise of my foreign policy consists of the following very simple proposition.

Italy needs a long period of peace: all of Europe, the whole world, but also Italy; I would dare say above all Italy, because Italy is a nation that has endured an enormous amount of sacrifice. And its dead were all Italians, of white ethnicity. Italy is a poor country. We must begin to admit this.

We have made enormous sacrifices, and we have 100 billion lire in debt.

However, other issues soon joined these. One was the emphasis on the early successes achieved by Fascist policy: the annexation of Fiume, the definitive recognition of the Dodecanese as part of Italy, and the transfer to Italy of the Giarabub oasis and the Oltre Giuba region. Another issue, closely linked to the previous one—with the clear intent of justifying the modest nature of these successes, but also of indirectly responding to those fascists who would have preferred a more dynamic and "action-oriented" policy—centered on the origins of the treaties that formed the basis of the agreements making these results possible and, more generally, on the constraints that weigh on any foreign policy.

"Foreign policy is conditioned by objective circumstances—factual, historical, and geographical, as well as moral and emotional; in foreign policy, situations can certainly be improved, but they can no longer be completely overturned."

Fascism had "found itself faced with treaties" concluded by previous governments; since a great power cannot fail to respect the treaties it has signed, it had to operate within their framework—to improve them and achieve the maximum possible from them, but always within their limits.

Finally, one more theme rounded out Mussolini's speech on foreign policy, intended for domestic consumption: Italy's need for peace; the international situation at the time, which compelled all diplomatic corps—and thus the Italian one as well—to be "cautious and circumspect"; and the need to convince people that "one cannot conduct foreign policy if the country is not disciplined and if the country is not armed"; none of this could make us forget what Italy's circumstances and needs were:

We are forty million people crammed into this narrow yet lovely peninsula of ours, which has too many mountains and a territory that cannot feed us all. There are countries surrounding Italy that have a

smaller population than ours and a territory twice the size of ours. And so one understands how the issue of Italian expansion in the world is a matter of life and death for the Italian race. I say expansion: expansion in every sense—moral, political, economic, and demographic.

Balanced as it was in all its components, this general discourse might have been acceptable to public opinion; however, it did little to satisfy that wing of Fascism that wanted a more decisive foreign policy, that had been disappointed by the agreements with Yugoslavia, and that made no secret of its aggressive intentions and dreams of greatness.

Substantially disregarding the expectations of this faction of Fascism was already creating no small amount of difficulty for Mussolini, so much so that at times he found himself compelled to grant it, at least formally, some satisfaction; preventing it from even expressing itself or putting forward its arguments would have been dangerous and imprudent.

Dangerous because, as the PNF gradually lost power and was politically hollowed out and subordinated to the state, it was necessary to leave some safety valves open, through which fascist revolutionary fervor and intransigence could be vented in the least harmful way for Mussolini and the emerging regime, while at the same time giving them the impression and illusion of leading the way for the Duce and expressing the “true” fascist spirit.

This was “apolitical” because it served Mussolini’s interests for certain ideas to circulate throughout the country, contribute to the education of young people, and present the fascist future to the Italian public—without, however, personally committing the Duce to a specific timeline or concrete plan. Not to mention that these rumors also served Mussolini on the international stage; on the one hand, to demonstrate that Italians—all Italians—felt the need for Italy to acquire new “clout” in the world and have its “rights” recognized; on the other hand, to better highlight his “moderation,” while at the same time warning other governments that he could not entirely ignore the “soul of Italy”; and yet another reason was to be able to launch, when he deemed it useful (and over time this modus operandi would become increasingly common), trial balloons and threats without personally assuming responsibility for them.

Without understanding this, one cannot grasp the great freedom that Mussolini, even after 1925, granted to the Fascist press—both periodicals and daily newspapers—on matters of foreign policy, ranging from the more strictly nationalist publications (“Politica,” “L’idea nazionale,” “La tribuna”) to those that were more strictly fascist but took critical and radical stances toward the policies of Palazzo Chigi (“Il Tevere,” “Il corriere padano,” and certain newspapers from Giulian and Zaratin), nor can one fully grasp how he made use of these and other publications—sometimes created ad hoc (as was the case with “Antieuropa”)—as circumstances dictated.

Having thus established the domestic aspect of his foreign policy, Mussolini was able to pursue for several years a diplomatic course that differed from that advocated by his party. A policy—and with this we return to the point from which we began this particular discussion—that differed markedly in style from that of the Consulta and distinguished itself in various nuances (for the time being almost never decisive but certainly indicative of the Duce’s true intentions over the medium and long term) from the one that the “careerists” would have preferred—but which, ultimately, the “career” faction did

not perceive as alien to its conception of the guiding principles of Italian foreign policy and, in some cases, even felt it implemented them better than previous governments had.

On the whole, the “career” faction had in fact never truly adhered to the foreign policy of these governments and was broadly divided into three main tendencies: two major ones—that of the anti-Giuliani faction and that of the moderate nationalists—and one minor one, that of the last Sonninians.

Alongside these main tendencies were others, such as that of the surviving Tittonians. These were different tendencies, each pursuing its own line, its own conception of privileged alliances and areas of greatest commitment, but they could easily coexist with one another and, at that moment, could also coexist well with Mussolini.

This was all the more true given that the Duce’s diplomatic inexperience and his— partly sincere and partly calculated, apparent willingness to heed their technical advice initially led many to believe they could essentially keep the helm of political affairs in their own hands; this led them to smile rather than worry about certain gaffes of his and to underestimate some warning signs that should instead have alarmed them, if only because of the unscrupulous nature of the approach to international relations that these signs revealed.

Consider the tendency Mussolini immediately displayed to supplement official diplomacy with a sort of “parallel diplomacy,” outside traditional channels, through his own trusted men and aimed at establishing contacts with pro-Fascist or right-wing political figures and groups to gauge their orientations and influence (sometimes even with concrete financial subsidies) their policies toward their respective governments or toward third countries.

A typical example of this was the mission carried out among the German right-wing groups in March 1924 on Mussolini’s behalf by General Capello.

Similarly, one should consider another tendency, also typical of Mussolini, to put foreign correspondents in Italy and numerous publications printed abroad to “work” for his cause. Not to mention the “support” for his policies that he began to organize among Italian communities abroad and through the Fasci abroad.

Some of these practices were certainly neither new nor unknown even to the democratic governments of other countries, and it must be acknowledged that they were bound to gain ground as political parties grew in importance and the influence of public opinion increased.

It is a fact, however, that Mussolini and fascism were the first to make extensive use of them, often disproportionately so in relation to the results achieved; certainly with outcomes that were frequently counterproductive and, above all, entangling official diplomacy itself in a series of affairs that were not only risky and costly but also unproductive—or nearly so—and in no way beneficial to the good name of Italy or the fascist regime itself.

In its early days, Mussolini’s foreign policy followed a readily identifiable strategic perspective that tied in with the line of Di San Giuliano, Contarini, and the moderate nationalists. Based on this approach, there were two objectives to be achieved: ensuring security in the Danube-Balkan region and striving for expansion in the Mediterranean and Africa.

The most significant manifestations of the first objective in 1924 were the policy of friendship with

Czechoslovakia and, above all, the January agreements with Yugoslavia (both of these moves were also intended to counterbalance, to some extent, French influence on the Little Entente); in the longer term, the resolution of the long-standing Albanian question, based on a relationship similar to that between England and Portugal—one of both alliance and protection. Through this, Mussolini also succeeded in placing the neighboring Slavic kingdom in a sort of stranglehold.

The recognition of the Soviet Union in 1924 can also be considered partially linked to this security policy in the Danube-Balkan region, in the sense that it helped to "bring Russia back into the fold" and thus to counterbalance, to some extent, the French presence in these regions; however, the agreements with the USSR were also—and perhaps primarily—driven by broader political considerations (to demonstrate that Fascist Italy did not act on the basis of ideological considerations and to try to undermine the Italian left) as well as economic factors.

It is more complex to summarize the other side of this policy—its inherently expansionist nature.

At that time, the idea of an independent Italian initiative was absurd. The only possibilities for an expansionist policy were linked to relations with England and France and to negotiations with these two countries to obtain colonial compensation from them based on the agreements signed in 1915 and the postwar "mandate" reorganization.

Even with regard to Ethiopia, Italian policy—which Mussolini conceived and implemented in the 1920s as "a peaceful and orderly colonial policy, based on the development of friendly, commercial, and economic relations"—could not proceed independently of British and French policy.

In fact, the Italian-Ethiopian Treaty of Friendship of August 2, 1928, was only concluded after lengthy diplomatic preparations and, more importantly, after a series of far-from-easy negotiations with Paris and, above all, with London: following the reaffirmation in 1925–26 of the 1906 agreements on their respective interests in Ethiopia and after Italy, in March 1928—in exchange for British consent to move from plans for economic penetration to a political treaty—had effectively renounced further economic penetration in Yemen.

Although not entirely straightforward (especially due to the tangled web of issues linked to the colonial problem and the diversity of viewpoints on many of them), the path of negotiations with England proved to be essentially viable, and despite setbacks, crises, and various difficulties, agreements were ultimately reached that allowed Mussolini to secure improvements to the eastern borders of Cyrenaica and, in East Africa, the Beyond Juba region.

Despite differing views and interests on individual issues and despite the Corfu incident (which caused a temporary cooling of relations between Rome and London), there were no serious causes for conflict between Italy and England during those years; on the contrary, both governments were interested in maintaining good relations. The British government—whether Conservative or Labour—was interested in Italian friendship for many reasons.

This was because Italy, having no territorial claims on the European continent, was at that time a source of stability and conservatism and, at the same time, a partial counterweight to French hegemony on the continent.

Because its colonial expansionism could ultimately only be subordinate to London's imperial policy and, given the Anglo-French rivalry in the Mediterranean—which had never been entirely quelled—it

also served as a useful counterweight to Paris in this sphere.

Finally, because the British—and Chamberlain in particular—realized the potential danger, or at least the source of unrest, that Fascist Italy might represent in the future, they preferred to keep a close watch on Mussolini and maintain good relations with him so as to influence him most effectively, use him as a pawn in their diplomatic game (as they did in December 1924, when Mussolini effectively scuttled the protocol "for the peaceful settlement of international disputes" approved by the League of Nations, which the British government did not want ratified), and, if necessary, redirect his expansionism toward areas where it would cause them the least harm.

While for England, Italy was a pawn in a game that, despite everything, still revolved around the agreement with France, for Mussolini and the "Carriera," London was the cornerstone of their entire policy.

As Guariglia wrote:

England was the only power that could provide us with effective assistance in our colonial policy, provided, of course, that we conducted that policy in harmony with the European situation and without causing unnecessary upheaval for our country. In Africa, as in Europe, it was inconceivable for Italy to act—not to say against, but not even outside of—British policy; this did not, however, imply that our conduct should have been completely passive and entirely submissive to London's wishes. I have always believed that a firm and wise Italian resolve could have achieved significant results even while facing considerable difficulties with the British government, provided only that certain fundamental British interests were respected—the limits and scope of which needed to be understood.

This explains their efforts—after an initial phase during which Mussolini deluded himself into thinking he could act on his own and serve as a mediator between the major powers, and especially after he saw his attempts to find common ground even with the French thwarted—to pursue an effective policy of friendship with London, without, however, completely relinquishing their autonomy of action in certain areas that were of marginal importance to England but traditionally of interest to Italy.

These efforts were ultimately crowned with success (to which the personal friendship between Mussolini and Chamberlain—which had developed during their meetings in Rome in December 1924 and, the following year, in October in Locarno and in December in Rapallo—also contributed) and ultimately made the Italian-British friendship one of the cornerstones of Italian foreign policy in the years that followed.

Far more difficult and essentially fruitless, however, were the attempts to initiate concrete negotiations with France. In the very first months following the "March on Rome," Mussolini persistently sought French friendship, repeatedly supporting—even publicly—Paris's position on reparations, to the point of finding himself caught between England and France, practically siding with the latter and, through his stance, facilitating the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr. In other words, he adopted a position that not only was not shared by many in Fascist circles but was certainly not one that would pave the

way for him with the British; and above all (apart from some support during the Corfu crisis), it did not even win him French friendship. Consequently, by the end of February 1923, he found himself forced to “rectify” it, distancing himself from Paris and turning increasingly toward London.

This was especially true after the electoral victory of the Cartel de la Gauche and the Matteotti assassination had made it clear that, at least for the time being, it was impossible to find any real common ground with Paris.

Apart from political and ideological reasons (which were destined to multiply due to the issue of exiles), an Italian-French agreement was made practically impossible by two main factors, one of a general nature and one more specific. The first was France’s policy of absolute continental hegemony and its intransigence in opposing any revision of the status quo established by the treaties that had ended the European conflict.

Under Poincaré, this policy was based on the pure principle of force. Under Briand, it took on a different form, guided by the principles of security, balance, and peaceful cooperation. The reality, however, was not very different; for Paris, it was essential to have a European system that would prevent Germany from regaining its status as a great power and from securing a revision of the terms imposed on it at the peace table, and which, at the same time, would ensure France’s hegemony in Europe.

Such a prospect was obviously unacceptable to Mussolini, both—first and foremost—as a matter of principle, because it meant condemning Italy to the status of a second-class power, with no room for maneuver or development, and because there was always the danger that, in the event of Franco-German collaboration, Italy would be the one to pay the price, since if Paris were to make concessions to Berlin, these could only have one name: Anschluss.

Of course, in the short term, Mussolini might even have provisionally accepted this prospect (even though it would undoubtedly have caused him major internal difficulties, in terms of public opinion and especially within Fascism); however, this would have required France to be willing to grant him concrete colonial concessions in return.

As the ambassador to Paris, Romano Avezzana, told Painlevé on April 27, 1925:

for Italy to cooperate in the peaceful reconstruction of Europe, it needed to be able to ensure adequate markets and supplies of raw materials for its growing population. The role that America had played thus far with regard to Italy was coming to an end, and, on the other hand, the Italian people were becoming increasingly intolerant of the obligation to forfeit their nationality in order to pursue their livelihoods elsewhere. It was therefore essential to give due consideration to our aspirations for a colonial dominion in Africa suitable for settlement and economic development.

In addition to resolving specific issues, such as participation in the international administration of Tangier and the legal status of Italians in Tunisia, Rome’s demands were aimed at securing the colonial compensation provided for in the Treaty of London, primarily through the revision and redistribution of postwar mandates and the establishment of new mandates to be assigned to Italy.

Paris, however, turned a deaf ear to these demands. For France, the “quid pro quo” for its friendship

was to consist, in practice—as was abundantly clear in 1925 during the negotiations for the Rhine Pact—in the guarantee that this friendship would ensure Italy's security both at the Brenner Pass and in the Adriatic. The Anschluss, according to Paris, was indeed a danger to France, but even more so to Italy: French security and Paris's friendship therefore corresponded to Italian interests, and Rome was thus expected to cooperate in that regard and consider itself adequately compensated by it.

As for the Adriatic, Italian security—again, according to Paris—could only be achieved by eliminating the sources of friction with Yugoslavia and the danger of a Habsburg restoration: hence the need for Rome to contribute to maintaining the status quo in the Danube-Balkan region and to use France as an intermediary to find a stable modus vivendi with Belgrade.

This approach to relations between France and Italy was, of course, unacceptable to Mussolini. Even setting aside Paris's refusal to consider Italy's colonial demands, the consequence of this approach would have been one and the same: it would have deprived Italian foreign policy of any real capacity for initiative, turning it into an appendage of French foreign policy, and would have effectively confirmed what Fascism contested most vehemently—namely, that Italy was not a true great power, but merely a second-rate power.

This explains not only the general evolution of Italian-French relations during this period—namely, their shift from an initial phase in which Mussolini sought French friendship to a second phase of overt coldness (not without even bitter controversies)—but also the stance Mussolini adopted toward the Locarno Pact.

There is no doubt that Mussolini was extremely interested in ensuring the security of the Brenner border and, therefore, in preventing the Anschluss.

That at this time he was considering the possibility of accepting Austria's union with Germany in exchange for "specific commitments to respect the Brenner border" (as he was forced to do in 1938) can be ruled out: the reference to this effect contained in a telegram he sent on June 8, 1925, with instructions to the ambassadors in London and Paris and to the Italian delegate to the League of Nations must, in our view, be understood solely within the context of the dispute with France over which of the two countries would have been more harmed by the Anschluss and, therefore, only as a bluff.

Mussolini's stance during the negotiations (February–October 1925) for the Rhine Security Pact and in response to its conclusion must, however, be viewed within a broader context. Faced with the Franco-German rapprochement initiated by Briand and Stresemann (which implicitly involved shifting German pressure southward, especially since, at least formally, Germany's eastern border was to be stabilized to some extent by the parallel German-Polish and German-Czech agreements, and Paris would have viewed a German expansion to the south less unfavorably than one at the expense of its friends in the Little Entente), and in light of the French refusal to compensate Italy in Africa for its participation in guaranteeing the Rhine frontier, it is highly likely that Mussolini would have welcomed at that time, an international agreement that would in some way confirm (even if only by referring to the Treaty of Versailles, which in Article 80 had expressly prohibited the possibility of the Anschluss) all of Germany's borders.

Aside from the desire to avoid isolation (perhaps the main reason that ultimately led him to participate in the Locarno Pact despite everything), at that moment—given the Franco-German rapprochement—such an agreement would in fact have safeguarded him from the very danger that German pressure

would sooner or later materialize, with tacit Franco-British consent, in the annexation of Austria by Germany, leading Germany to exert direct pressure on Italy and the Balkan Peninsula.

However, when it became clear in May that an explicit reference to the Treaty of Versailles would not be included—since Stresemann would not accept it, Paris would not give up either the guarantee of its eastern border or its rapprochement with Berlin for that reason, and London was willing to commit only to guaranteeing the Rhine border—and, in this situation, the only thing Italy could have obtained would have been a "special" guarantee of the Brenner border from France, the pact became more harmful than helpful to Mussolini, and he adopted a wait-and-see stance, secretly hoping that it would fall through.

In that international context, the Rhine Security Pact would, in fact, have meant for Fascist Italy a loss of prestige and a diplomatic defeat—or, at the very least, an obstacle to Mussolini's foreign policy, as it was taking shape following the abandonment of the policy of friendship with France.

Viewed in general terms, the security pact could not have been to Mussolini's liking (and, at least initially, not to Contarini's either, though he likely had to distance himself from the Duce's position in the end) because it created two types of borders: the Rhine border, guaranteed twice (by the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pact), and the others (guaranteed only by the Treaty of Versailles), and this "would have seriously altered the situation resulting from World War I, committing Italy to guaranteeing the French and Belgian borders without a corresponding guarantee for its own."

Certainly—and this brings us to the most significant aspect of the diplomatic affair surrounding the Locarno Pact—to remedy this, there was Briand's offer of a French guarantee for the Brenner Pass; but for Mussolini, this was even more unacceptable than the pact itself: since the pact guaranteed only the Rhine border, this sole and specific French guarantee would in fact have meant two things above all: that, in principle, Mussolini recognized the possibility—despite Article 80 of the Treaty of Versailles—of the Anschluss, and that, faced with this possibility, Italy had no alternative but French protection.

Faced with these prospects, the best course for Mussolini was to remain outside the security pact; in this way, he would not have contradicted the revisionist sentiments—and thus those hostile to the Versailles status quo—that were widespread within his party, and he would have secured considerable leeway to attempt to supplant or, at least, weaken French influence in Eastern Europe, in the Danube and Balkan regions, given that—despite the German-Polish and German-Czech agreements—it was evident that, with the Rhine Security Pact, France was in fact demonstrating, if not exactly a lack of interest in its allies in those European regions, then a prioritization of its own security over theirs; and this could not help but encourage German revanchist tendencies toward the east (as well as toward the south).

It is certainly no coincidence that after Locarno, Mussolini became an advocate (adapting this strategy to the reality created by the signing of the Rhine Security Pact) of a Danubian-Balkan security pact which, in fact, if it had come to fruition, would have been anti-German and anti-French; and, accordingly, he showed himself willing to tone down the anti-Yugoslav aspects of his policy; furthermore, had he not feared creating difficulties for himself in the United States, everything suggests that Mussolini would also have been willing to respond positively to Soviet overtures (the USSR was another country in which the Locarno Pact aroused concerns) for "a genuine political pact."

If Mussolini was ultimately persuaded, albeit very reluctantly, to sign the Locarno Pact, this was due not only to the insistence of the "careerists," to the need not to fall out of step with England, especially

since the security pact ultimately represented a loosening of the Franco-British alliance, and London's friendship was not only indispensable to him but also allowed him to integrate his political initiative into the moderate flexibility of international relations that the Foreign Office favored (unlike Paris, which was adamant in its policy of the status quo); furthermore, from a formal standpoint, joining the pact could enhance his domestic prestige, given that the agreement placed Italy on an equal footing with England, making both its guarantors "au-dessus de la mêlée."

Significant in this regard are the statements Mussolini made to the Senate on May 28, 1926, at the opening of the debate on foreign policy in general and on the ratification of the Locarno Pact in particular:

The structure of the Locarno Pact is very simple: it involves two powers, France and Germany, which pledge not to attack one another and to live in peace.

But since this commitment is not enough, standing alongside them are two powers that guarantee this commitment: England on one side and Italy on the other.

The question that could have been raised before October—whether or not Italy should join this alliance—I resolved in the affirmative, and I believe the Senate is unanimous in recognizing that we could not have acted otherwise, that failing to sign the Locarno Pact would have been a colossal mistake. First, we would have excluded ourselves from a fundamental pact binding the powerful nations of Europe. Second, we would have missed the opportunity to place ourselves, on a memorable occasion, on an equal footing with the British Empire. This is very important, and it has rightly been said… that this pact is sufficient to justify a legitimate surge of national pride.

Exactly one year later, in his Ascension Day speech, Mussolini, returning to the subject of the Locarno Pact and the so-called "spirit of Locarno"—that is, the hopes that the pact had raised in Europe and, above all, the interpretations of those who had presented it as a historic "turning point" from which a new way of understanding relations between states and a long period of cooperation and peace would emerge— did not merely observe ("without any intention of controversy," he said, but, in reality, with transparent satisfaction) that "the 'spirit of Locarno,' today, barely two years later, has faded extraordinarily," but he made it clearly understood that responsibility for the difficult international situation lay primarily with France:

What has happened? What has happened is that the nations—let us call them "Locarno-aligned"—are arming themselves furiously on land and at sea; what has happened is that in some of these nations, people have even dared to speak of a war of ideologies that was to be waged by the democracy of

immortal principles against this unyielding fascist, anti-democratic, anti-liberal, anti-socialist, and anti-Masonic Italy.

The accusation was not new; at the PNF level, it had already been officially formulated two and a half months earlier in the *Foglio d'ordini*; in Parliament, some deputies—albeit minor ones—had voiced it; and it had long been a favorite theme of the fascist press, which often employed highly inflammatory language.

One need only skim through the newspapers of the time—even the most authoritative ones and those most directly inspired by the Duce—to realize this immediately. They offer the full range of arguments put forward—from the more general ones, which drew on international news to sound the death knell for the "spirit of Locarno," to the more specific ones, which denounced German revanchism but above all accused France of pursuing an anti-Italian and anti-fascist policy, of supporting governments hostile to Italy, of accusing it of militarism, and above all of harboring anti-fascist exiles—adopting their arguments and slanderous attacks and allowing them to make France the organizational hub of their "crimes" against fascism and Mussolini himself.

All of this was accompanied by a constant reiteration of Italy's "rights" to receive the colonial compensation promised to it in 1915, which it desperately needed to ensure work and dignity for its people.

The claims and hypotheses put forward in this regard were extremely varied and at times fanciful (nevertheless, they are significant for identifying the trends driving the various groups behind the newspapers and magazines that published them), and it was not uncommon for authoritative voices—including that of Arnaldo Mussolini—to join the chorus, which certainly did nothing to calm the situation. In this climate, following the Lucetti and Zamboni attacks (in the second half of 1926), there were also several violent demonstrations against French consulates (in Livorno, Venice, Ventimiglia, Tripoli, and Benghazi).

This led, especially in terms of public opinion, to considerable mutual tension, which peaked toward the end of 1926, to the point that Ambassador Romano Avezzana, in a telegram to Mussolini, reported that in France "the possibility of a war with Italy—which until recently was considered impossible—is now beginning to be discussed as an event for which France, albeit reluctantly, must prepare because it is desired by Italy."

That there was actually a danger of a conflict between Italy and France at that time can be absolutely ruled out.

The anti-French campaign underway in Italy was undoubtedly, to a large extent, orchestrated by Mussolini for domestic political reasons—as a diversion, as a unifying national-patriotic element during the particularly difficult period of the regime's founding, and as a ploy to justify the lack of concrete results in his foreign policy.

In part, however, it was also directly linked to the often bitter controversies that characterized diplomatic relations between Rome and Paris during this period.

The responsibility for these disputes lies, in almost all cases, with Italy. Based on the documentation now available, there is no doubt that Mussolini not only worked during this period to undermine the Locarno system but also constantly sought to counter French hegemony in the Danube-Balkan region, first by attempting, as mentioned, to launch the Danube-Balkan Security Pact, then by trying to prevent the conclusion of a direct Franco-Yugoslav agreement (going so far as to threaten, in March 1926, to reconsider Italy's position "with respect to the other European states bound by the Locarno Pact") and, above all, by striving to destabilize the Little Entente, both from within (by attempting to influence Romania) and, especially, by championing Hungarian revisionism.

The Italian-Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, signed in April 1927 between Mussolini and Count Bethlen, is generally considered a decisive moment in Fascist foreign policy.

This treaty marked the completion of the break between the first phase of this policy—the Mussolini-Contarini phase—and the phase that was more strictly "Mussolinian"; the latter began between late 1925 and early 1926 with the sabotage of the Locarno system (in particular by emphasizing anti-French elements and attempting to exclude Germany, so as to exploit its subversive potential against Germany) and with the abandonment of plans for an agreement with Yugoslavia—which led to Contarini's resignation in March 1926—the Mussolini-led shift would in fact take full shape in 1927 with the revisionist decision made through the agreement with Hungary.

There is certainly some truth to this periodization and assessment; in our view, for the purposes of a concrete historical evaluation of the significance of the 1927 Italian-Hungarian treaty and, more generally, of Mussolini's revisionism, it is necessary to place this issue within a broader context, which brings us back to Italian-French relations.

The years immediately following the Locarno Pact certainly constituted one of the most critical periods in relations between Rome and Paris. And, as we have said, this was primarily due to Italian actions. However, it is incorrect to speak of Mussolini's Francophobia.

Quite rightly, Carocci, speaking of Italian-French relations during these years, wrote: "We quarrel with France often; we do not break ties."

These words were spoken by Mussolini at the Livorno meeting in September 1926 to reassure Chamberlain about relations—often so stormy—with Italy's neighbor across the Alps. The words were sincere and reflected the truth: a truth that, while ruling out a complete break—at least during that period—amply acknowledged the quarrels.

To understand Mussolini's revisionism and, more generally, the Duce's entire foreign policy during this period, one must start from a premise that may seem absurd or paradoxical, but which is the key to his political strategy up until the mid-1930s and, in part, even beyond: Mussolini pursued an anti-French policy in order to reach an agreement with France.

In a largely static international situation such as that of the second half of the 1920s, for the Duce, the outlook for Italian foreign policy—once the alliance with Britain had been secured—remained the same as in the period immediately following his rise to power: despite Paris's intransigence, he saw friendship with France as the goal to be achieved.

Only this, in fact, could—in theory—satisfy both his aspirations for colonial expansion and his security

needs vis-à-vis Germany.

If one closely examines Italian-French diplomatic relations during this period—and, at the same time, refrains from being swayed by the outward aspects of Mussolini's other parallel political initiatives—it is easy to see that Paris was always the Duce's guiding star.

This was true when he was fiercely arguing with the Austrians and, above all, with the Germans over the Anschluss and the conditions of the German-speaking population of South Tyrol: the two speeches to the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate on February 6 and 10, 1926, were indeed directed against the Bavarian Minister-President, Held, and Stresemann; but Mussolini's true interlocutor was Paris, so much so that—to make the meaning clearer—two weeks later Mussolini hastened to give an interview to *Le Petit Parisien* in which he stated:

It was essential to denounce this threat of Pan-Germanism. Those people have forgotten nothing, have resigned themselves to nothing, and still cling to their dreams of yesterday. The Germanic danger should bring Italy and France ever closer together. Their interests are identical. There is no serious issue that divides us. With their united bloc of eighty million people, which counterbalances the German bloc, France and Italy together can impose peace.

And this was true even when he was drawing closer to Hungary and becoming an advocate of "active" revisionism. Beyond the high-sounding rhetoric intended for domestic consumption (such as the remarks made in the Senate on June 5, 1928), Mussolini's revisionism was essentially moderate, consisting more of words than of any actual willingness to commit concretely to carrying it out.

In their relationship with Budapest, while they shared a desire to make the Italian-Hungarian friendship a sort of "anti-Slavic and anti-democratic bulwark," Mussolini's and Bethlen's objectives were otherwise quite different.

While Bethlen sought in this alliance a concrete foothold for realizing his country's revisionist aspirations, for Mussolini, Hungary was to serve to isolate and undermine Yugoslavia, to act, together with Austria, as a check on German revisionism, and above all to exert direct and indirect political pressure (through the Little Entente) on France.

In this regard, the following passage from a lengthy comprehensive report on Italian foreign policy—most likely drafted by L. Vitetti in the first half of July 1932 to assess the new situation resulting from the Lausanne Conference—is highly significant:

In reality, our revisionism, as far as Italy is concerned, has always had—and continues to have—a specific aim: to revise the distribution of colonial territories to our advantage. In Europe, our revisionism has served to exert political pressure on France, not to satisfy any of our own needs. When speaking of revising the treaties, our focus has always been on Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, the

inequitable distribution of mandates established at the Paris Conference, and the conditions of inferiority in which Italy finds itself vis-à-vis the victorious Great Powers. We have always believed that it was useful to stir up and amplify the German threat in Europe, so that France would be forced to revise the colonial situation in our favor. It is neither the Germans of Silesia nor the Hungarians of Transylvania who interest us. It is the Italians who must be given land and work, fields to cultivate, and markets to exploit. Whether it be Silesia or Cameroon, we have our own “revision” that is of urgent concern to us. The others will have to look out for themselves.

In the following pages, we will return to this report, which, as will be seen, constitutes an “internal” document essential for understanding Fascist foreign policy in the second half of the 1920s and, in particular, some of the reasons for Grandi’s replacement as head of the Foreign Ministry in July 1932.

For now, it suffices to emphasize the significance of the retrospective analysis of Mussolini’s revisionism contained therein and to draw attention to the explanation provided.

From these, in fact, a fundamental strategy clearly emerges—undoubtedly shaped by the idea of the absolute necessity of securing a colonial empire for Italy—but based on a premise that was certainly not that of Mussolini’s all-too-often asserted Francophobia, but, on the contrary, on the need to reach—by any means necessary, even the most unscrupulous and potentially dangerous ones—an agreement with Paris.

Confirmation of this is provided by the care Mussolini took during this period to prevent “disputes” with France from leading to a “break” and to seize every opportunity to move from “disputes” to an agreement—preferably comprehensive, that is, resolving all outstanding issues between the two countries, but if necessary even a partial one—that would pave the way for their resolution.

And in this regard, in fact, it must be said that there is no shortage of evidence to suggest that Mussolini was more open to a partial agreement than the “careerists,” who were more inclined toward greater firmness in order to reach a comprehensive agreement.

From this perspective, it becomes clear why, in 1926 and the early months of 1927, even as public controversy against France grew more intense, the Duce never completely closed the door to proposals for rapprochement and agreement that came from time to time from the Quai d’Orsay and Ambassador Romano Avezzana, and he kept alive the talks initiated in 1925 during the negotiations for the Locarno Pact.

And one can understand why—despite the conclusion of the Franco-Yugoslav Friendship Treaty (November 11, 1927), which he had so strongly opposed, and the fierce protests it had sparked in Italy—when, on November 30, 1927, Briand declared to the Chamber that he was firmly convinced that, despite the friction and bitter controversies, France and Italy could reach an agreement, he immediately seized the opportunity and hastened to give an interview to the *Dépeche tunisienne* in which he stated:

We must all facilitate the formation of a vast Latin bloc. Not only the Iberian nations, but the Latin republics are turning their gaze toward Rome and Paris. To unite these diverse forces and these peoples animated by the same faith—for whom civilization itself is a shared heritage—means ensuring world peace and guarding against the threat of barbarism… France and Italy are meant to get along. We are not speaking of "Latin blood"—race is a very vague concept, given the many interminglings over the centuries—but civilization and culture constitute a wonderful shared heritage… That is why the Franco-Italian family may at times weather stormy times, but we would never reach the point of open discord, because we are brothers who sometimes quarrel but who love one another in spite of everything.

And to lend greater authority to this initiative, on December 16 the Italian press published an official account of the previous day's Council of Ministers meeting, which included these words from the Duce:

I believe that a long, cordial, and lasting understanding between France and Italy is possible, useful, and—I would add—necessary; but for such an understanding to be solid, it cannot be based on exclusively literary or purely sentimental grounds, but rather on the elimination of those factors that may constitute concrete points of friction between the two countries.

Behind Briand's overture, as well as behind Mussolini's prompt response, stood England, concerned by the tension between the two countries and its escalation following the Franco-Yugoslav and Italo-Albanian treaties.

It is difficult, however, to believe that Mussolini's willingness was due solely to British pressure. This pressure undoubtedly played a role; however, its greatest influence was most likely exerted on the French, in the sense at least, to make them understand the necessity—if they truly wished to attempt to initiate negotiations with Mussolini—of taking into account the one preliminary condition he could not waive (both as a matter of prestige and because it corresponded to an issue on which the Fascist Party was intransigent), namely, to place some restraint on the activities of Italian anti-Fascists in France.

For his part, the Duce was just waiting for an opportunity to begin negotiations—specifically, a gesture of "goodwill" from Paris that would allow him to rein in the Francophobic fascist elements and boast of a new success for domestic consumption. Indeed, it is difficult not to notice the certainly not coincidental temporal connection between Briand's speech (November 30), the French government's first measure against the Italian anti-fascist press (the request, on December 5 or 6, to the editor of *France de Nice et du Sud-Est* to cease disrupting Franco-Italian relations), Mussolini's interview (given on December 10 and published on the 12th), and the French government's second measure against the anti-fascist press (the ban on the *Corriere degli italiani*, decided by the Council of Ministers on December 13).

If one really wishes to look for external factors influencing Mussolini's willingness to cooperate, rather than insisting on pressure from London, we would be inclined to attach some weight—if anything—to the fear that must have arisen in Mussolini upon hearing reports that Stresemann was on the verge of attempting to exploit Italian-French tensions to bring about a rapprochement with Paris, which would have been entirely to the detriment of Italy's room for maneuver.

Moreover, the Duce's willingness is demonstrated by the way he framed his discussions with the French. A note of his dated December 4, 1927, allows us to know precisely what, according to Mussolini, were the outstanding issues between Italy and France: Tangier, Tunis (a twenty-year renewal of the 1896 conventions), the southern and western borders of Tripolitania, a free hand in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean, the denationalization of Italians, "right of asylum" for exiles, and a revision of the mandates.

In line with this note, before the talks began, F. Coppola and, above all, V. Gayda outlined the conditions under which the agreement sought by Briand and the Duce could be concluded.

However, when Mussolini had his first meeting with Ambassador Beaumarchais on January 30, his demands—and especially the tone in which he formulated them—were far more moderate and spread out over time:

In examining the question of relations between the two countries, we must know where we are starting from, but above all, we must establish where we want to go. The aim is to clarify certain details—even if they are delicate—to pave the way for long-term political and diplomatic stability between the two countries, or do we wish to limit ourselves solely to examining minor issues without asking whether all of this should lead, as I believe, to a genuine treaty of friendship and non-aggression—except in the cases provided for at Locarno—which, together with other economic solutions, would constitute Italy's political counterpart?

I call the issues I am discussing "minor" because none of them concerns the metropolitan territory of France. I am intelligent enough not to bring such matters to the table. The minor issues are Tangier (virtually resolved), the status of Italians in Tunis (resolvable), border adjustments in Tripolitania, the question of mandates, and Italy's position in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. As for the mandates, we are not asking you for Syria. We wouldn't even want it if you were to grant it to us. But if tomorrow all the mandates were put back on the table, France should not oppose Italy's legitimate requests. The element that could be included among the political concessions would be the Anschluss.

After this initial meeting, negotiations continued at long intervals over the following months, both in Rome—always between Mussolini and Beaumarchais—and in Paris, between the new Italian ambassador, Manzoni, and the Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay, Berthelot. It soon became clear, however, that the French were not willing—apart from the issue of Tangier, which was already on the

path to an autonomous resolution—to accept Italy's demands even in principle; nevertheless, Mussolini continued for some time to appear optimistic and conciliatory; to the point that if the negotiations became increasingly infrequent and eventually petered out, this was not so much due to him as to the "carriera" and especially to the Director General for Europe and the Levant at Palazzo Chigi, Guariglia, who—likely acting in concert with the most hardline elements of the Ministry of the Colonies—on at least two occasions saw fit to scuttle them, convinced that Italy would gain no appreciable advantage from a possible agreement and that, therefore, it was not in its interest to tie its own hands.

Underlying this negative decision by the "career diplomats"—which Mussolini ultimately adopted as his own, albeit probably reluctantly so as not to displease the most hardline faction of fascism—was undoubtedly the conviction that time was essentially on Italy's side; that is, sooner or later France would have to accept Italy's demands: its security needs would, in fact, eventually force it to seek Rome's friendship and pay the corresponding price in order to counter the increasingly evident German revanchism.

In the abstract, one cannot say that this was a misguided calculation, nor was it out of step with "good" diplomatic tradition. Moreover, this calculation was already finding its first confirmation in the emergence in France of a segment of public opinion that—faced with the increasingly evident fragility of hopes for a stable modus vivendi with the Weimar Republic—was indeed turning toward the idea of the need for an anti-German agreement with Italy.

However, if one considers that, in order to give substance to such a policy, it was necessary not only to prevent any Franco-German rapprochement (for which Italy would inevitably have paid the price), but even to exploit German revisionism and revanchism for anti-French purposes, it immediately becomes clear just how fraught with grave risks this policy was and how it exceeded Italy's objective capabilities.

England, with its geographical position and power, could afford to foster a relatively fluid situation in Europe that would prevent the establishment of hegemony by a single continental power.

While Italy needed Germany to weaken France and force it to come to terms with Italy, it simultaneously needed France to contain Germany's growing power and aggression.

Given this objective contradiction, to prevent it from becoming irreconcilable, it would have been necessary for German dynamism not to exceed a certain limit and to serve only as a threat: if it had become a reality, Italy would in fact have lost its leverage over France and, with it, its freedom of maneuver as a great power; so that, in the end, it was a choice between the two: either with France, with no other consideration than the interest in common security, or with Germany, in a relationship that would inevitably prove precarious in the long run, given the objective disparity in their respective weight.

That said, it must also be noted that in 1928–29, there was no realistic basis for believing that German dynamism would assert itself so soon and on such a massive scale as it did within a few years, nor could anyone have foreseen the particular nature it would assume.

This explains, at least in part, the error made by Mussolini and, above all, by Italian diplomacy, which, moreover, was traditionally accustomed to operating within a system of checks and balances that had yielded good results up until the 1914–18 war and which, after 1919, it had essentially always hoped to reestablish and exploit once again.

Nor, on the other hand, despite Mussolini's fear of Germany, had the German factor been given much attention by Palazzo Chigi until then.

Thus, the fact that now, in the face of French intransigence, Italy began to look to Germany with ever greater insistence, and that revisionist rhetoric was increasingly applied to Germany as well, should come as no surprise; just as the relative modesty of the steps taken toward Berlin toward the end of the 1920s should not lead one to establish a direct, organic link between their subsequent proliferation and the rise of National Socialism in Germany: the policy of playing the German card to induce France to reach an agreement was conceived and initiated before Hitler's star shone in the international firmament and regardless of any calculation based on it; if it did not yield concrete results at first, it was only because the international situation was still largely static and, despite everything, influenced by the fictitious Franco-German rapprochement brought about in the shadow of the "spirit of Locarno."

In the preceding pages, we have sought to identify the key moments in Italian foreign policy during the first seven years following the "March on Rome" and, at the same time, to grasp its underlying motivations.

From what we have said, in our view, several key points emerge, which can be summarized as follows:

- In these early years, for both general reasons (the static nature of the international situation) and specific ones (the internal situation in Italy), Mussolini's foreign policy was largely unresponsive, lacking in effective autonomy, and conceived essentially as a function of domestic policy—that is, as one of the elements aimed at fostering consensus around the regime that was taking shape;

- Within this general framework, Mussolini and the "careerists" aimed above all to implement a security policy in Europe and a policy of expansion in the eastern Mediterranean and especially in Africa;

- Both of these policies were predicated on friendship with England and France, considered necessary both because of the objective reality of the European situation and because colonial expansion was deemed possible only through a series of agreements with these two powers aimed at implementing the "colonial suspension" clause of the London Pact;

- Although there were some temporary frictions, this policy of friendship was successfully implemented with England, but not so with France;

- This led to tensions—at times even serious—with France and the emergence of a tendency to force Paris into an agreement by attempting to undermine its system of European hegemony and make Italy indispensable to its security, first by supporting Hungarian revisionism and then German revisionism.

The results achieved, however, had been quite modest and, on the whole, had not enhanced the prestige of Fascist Italy in the world.

The domestic consequences were even more serious.

On the "career" front, Mussolini had lost the cooperation of a man of great experience and prestige such as Contarini, and his willingness to enter into a limited agreement with France had provoked resistance even from men like Guariglia. Within the Fascist leadership as well, while his foreign policy

had found support during moments of greater “firmness” (the Corfu incident, disputes over South Tyrol, and with Yugoslavia), on the whole it had disappointed and at times irritated many—especially the most fervently Francophobic and colonialist factions.

Finally, at the level of public opinion, while the “acceptance” of this policy was undoubtedly greater than at the party level, in the long run it could give rise to both disappointment and, above all, fears: for while there was no shortage of ultra-nationalists at this level as well, the vast majority of Italians favored a policy of peace; thus, while a certain degree of nationalism could serve as a unifying force around the regime (especially for the lower and middle classes, who felt the “betrayal” suffered at the Versailles conference most acutely), overly intense anti-French or anti-Yugoslav rhetoric, or an excessive insistence on colonial claims, could ultimately prove counterproductive for the regime.

Given this situation, it is understandable that, having by then stabilized his domestic power through the Conciliation and the plebiscite, Mussolini came to view the issue of foreign policy in the second half of 1929 as significantly more important than it had been up to that point and—without it yet becoming the central aspect of his policy—began to assign it a growing weight within the overall framework of his politics.

This was all the more true because, in 1929 itself, on the one hand, hopes and fears abroad regarding an imminent fall of fascism dissipated almost completely, and the conviction took hold that Mussolini must be regarded as a reality with which one would have to reckon for a long time to come; and, on the other hand, the international situation began to show increasingly evident signs of greater dynamism and, consequently, of imminent decisive changes that would afford Italy greater autonomy and room for maneuver in foreign policy.

In this regard, it suffices to recall: the electoral defeat of the Conservatives in England and the Labour Party’s rise to power in early June (with a general orientation toward a pacifist foreign policy); the increasingly evident collapse of the illusory Franco-German rapprochement (which the death of Stresemann on October 3 and the worsening of internal tensions in Germany would further accelerate); the resurgence, with the expiration of the Dawes Plan and the negotiations for what would later become the Young Plan, of the issue of reparations and war debts; the return of the United States to the forefront of European politics; and, a fact undoubtedly less significant than the previous ones but important for Italy, the rise to power in Austria in September of Schober’s conservative government.

In the absence of precise evidence to determine when Mussolini actually made the decision to give Fascist foreign policy a character that differed in various respects from what it had been up to that point, the formal act that can be taken as an indicator of the moment when he implemented this decision is the appointment of Dino Grandi as Minister of Foreign Affairs on September 12, 1929.

Since it took place as part of the sweeping government reshuffle carried out on that same day, this appointment did not, at the time, hold any particular significance for most people, appearing, on the one hand, the consequence of the Duce’s broader decision to streamline the many—too many—ministries he had come to lead, and, on the other hand, a natural promotion of an undersecretary who had proven himself in previous years—an appointment, therefore, not unlike those of Bottai, Balbo, Gazzera, and Sirianni.

In a certain sense, one might even say that these reasons appeared even more valid for Grandi’s appointment as minister than those that might have justified some of the other promotions.

Aside from Mussolini's desire to relieve himself of the direct, day-to-day management of so many ministries (and the Foreign Ministry was certainly one of the most burdensome) and to entrust responsibility to certain more distinctly Fascist figures who had risen to prominence at his side in previous years, it was necessary, at a time when major international conferences and increasing diplomatic activity were foreseeable, for the head of the Foreign Ministry to be able to participate personally and—as we say today—full-time in these activities.

This would have been impossible for Mussolini, both because of his numerous commitments in Italy and for reasons of personal security. Long and frequent trips abroad would, in fact, have exposed his life to too great a risk of anti-Fascist attacks and forced him to organize such a security detail around him that—even setting aside the technical difficulties—it would have been politically counterproductive.

Nor would it have been possible for him to be frequently replaced by a mere undersecretary, who would inevitably have found himself at a disadvantage in meetings and gatherings where other countries were represented at the ministerial level.

Moreover, since he had to appoint a minister, the only person Mussolini could consider was Grandi. The foreign minister of Fascist Italy could only be a well-known and influential Fascist. Mussolini had no doubts about this, and, in any case, no other solution would have been accepted by the National Fascist Party (PNF), which had long been champing at the bit and protesting what it saw as the lack of Fascist influence in Palazzo Chigi and the "career bureaucracy."

Theoretically, Federzoni could have been a candidate (who, moreover, enjoyed a certain amount of credibility in some foreign conservative circles, in France and especially in England); but there were simply too many arguments against him: his lack of diplomatic experience, his extreme colonialism, the fact that he was more a man of the Crown than of fascism, and, above all, the deep-seated hostility toward him felt by broad sectors of the party, ranging from the old intransigent squadristi to the new, second-generation fascists.

By contrast, every possible argument spoke in Grandi's favor. He was an elderly and influential fascist; as a fascist, he was a moderate, though his arrival as undersecretary at Palazzo Chigi had marked the beginning of the ministry's fascistization; intelligent, capable, and adaptable, he had earned the appreciation of the "career bureaucrats" and had integrated well with them on a personal level as well, defending them on a couple of occasions from the party's excessive meddling; As undersecretary, he had demonstrated exceptional abilities, and after Contarini's resignation, he had taken care to ensure that—following a brief period during which Chiaramonte Bordonaro served as the ministry's secretary-general—this important position remained unfilled, thereby centralizing the effective leadership of the ministry in his own hands. According to Guariglia, by doing so, Grandi was not merely aiming to secure his promotion to minister but—looking ahead—had his sights set much higher.

Through his activities at Palazzo Chigi, he sought to position himself "in a sphere distinct from the rest of the party—one that was higher and less vulnerable—from which alone, with the help of time and fortune, he could soar to greater heights."

Leaving aside for the moment this discussion of Grandi's plans for the "post-Mussolini" era (which, after all, would fit well with the man's personality, his ambition, and his conception of fascism as a transitory phenomenon), it is a fact that in 1929 his promotion to minister was virtually inevitable, and there is no reason to believe that the Duce had any doubts when making that decision.

At that time, Grandi was the right man for Mussolini not only for the reasons mentioned, but also because, while Mussolini was convinced of the need to rationalize the foreign policy pursued up to that point and adapt it to the new international reality that was taking shape, he most likely also realized that this would inevitably arouse perplexity and hostility within the Fascist camp; and, therefore, given the uncertainty about how the international situation would ultimately unfold, he preferred to leave, at least formally, the responsibility for this rationalization and adaptation to someone else; both so that, depending on the results, he could officially endorse it or reject it, and to reserve for himself as much freedom as possible to have Grandi deliver one message to foreign counterparts and, if necessary, present a different one himself for domestic consumption.

Nor, for that matter, could Mussolini have harbored any suspicion or jealousy toward Grandi at that time; the controversies surrounding the "Pact of Pacification" and the vacillations of October 1922 were now a thing of the past, from which Grandi had amply redeemed himself in the subsequent years —first under Federzoni at the Ministry of the Interior, then under Mussolini himself at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; not to mention that if there was one leading Fascist at that time who showed himself to be completely devoted to the Duce, showered him with praise, and declared himself his faithful disciple in foreign policy, it was none other than Grandi.

In the summer of '32, when he personally resumed leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mussolini expressed a largely negative assessment of Grandi's management. Without previewing that judgment here or the reasons behind it, the issue we now feel it is necessary to address—even before discussing the most important events in Italian foreign policy during those three years—is that of the objectives Grandi set for his policy and the broader conception of the international reality that underlay his strategy.

Only in this way is it possible to grasp the connection between his management of Italian foreign policy and Mussolini's attitude—both with regard to the foreign policy positions Mussolini took during those years and in reference to his decision in 1932 to personally resume leadership of the ministry and his assessment of Grandi's tenure.

Di Nolfo wrote:

Up to that point, Mussolini's role as foreign minister had entailed a responsibility and a vision limited solely to the consideration of Italian interests. On none of the major international issues that arose during the period 1922–29 (with the exception of the 1923 memorandum on reparations) had the Italian government taken an independent and original position; Mussolini had always been content to follow the initiatives of others and to remain on the sidelines of these matters.

Starting in 1929, however, first the new reparations conferences and then the disarmament conferences —by bringing to the forefront those major issues that… reflected the shift in the global situation— demanded that Italy adopt new positions, which, based on the premises established by fascism, could not help but be original and independent.

For the first time, therefore, Mussolini and fascism found themselves faced with problems that required that comprehensive and organic vision of international politics which Mussolini had failed to formulate during the years he had served as foreign minister.

What was unique about these issues was that they could no longer be considered from a narrow and unilateral perspective but required a broader outlook and consideration of the general interest.

There is no doubt that this was the fundamental requirement of the new phase initiated by Grandi as minister, just as there is no doubt regarding two other points: that Mussolini fully agreed with Grandi on this requirement, and that it soon took on ever-greater significance as the “Great Crisis” took hold in Europe as well and made its impact increasingly felt. The issue to be clarified is another: what was the comprehensive and systematic vision of international politics—and, therefore, of the general interest—that underlay this new phase?

To answer this question, we will draw primarily on the reports Grandi delivered between 1929 and 1932 to the Council of Ministers and the Grand Council of Fascism, as well as his reports to Mussolini—documents, therefore, that are not public—from which it is easier to discern the author’s true thoughts and to draw elements for comparison with what Grandi and Mussolini themselves were simultaneously stating in public.

Particularly significant for our purposes is the report to the Grand Council of October 2, 1930, both because by this time the basic outlines of this new phase had already been almost completely defined, and because, having to refute a series of criticisms leveled at his policy from within the Fascist movement, Grandi addressed virtually all the issues inherent in it in this report.

For Grandi, the most pressing issue was, first and foremost, the rationalization of Italian foreign policy—or, in his own words, giving it a sense of unity. The foreign policy of a great power could not be approached in a fragmented and “often incoherent” manner, nor could it “depend on what is necessarily the polemics, politics, and ideology of a political party in the process of formation, where at times—albeit unconsciously—the contingent problems of domestic politics may take precedence over the permanent issues of foreign policy.”

Grandi was always convinced of this, and it was no coincidence that he returned to the subject several times in his report of October 2, 1930, with statements that must have sounded anything but fascist to many members of the Grand Council.

For him, political regimes and ideologies were one thing; political and economic relations between states were another:

A state’s foreign policy consists of making the most of every opportunity and possibility to the benefit

of its own country—including, and above all, those offered by its adversary.

Ideological prejudices should not interfere with them. The recognition of the USSR and the good relations with Moscow—which Mussolini had sought and which Grandi tried to develop during two meetings with Litvinov—demonstrated not only that this was possible but that it brought significant advantages.

Drawing on this precedent, Grandi—as long as he served as foreign minister—always sought—while asserting its fascist nature—to avoid the ideologization of his foreign policy.

As he stated in the Grand Council on October 2, 1930:

Indeed, the ideology of a political party is one thing; government action is another. The former operates in the realm of the absolute; the latter operates amid real facts, practical possibilities, and broader yet equally well-defined tasks and responsibilities for the defense and protection of the nation's interests—not only those that are close at hand and immediate, but also, and above all, those that are distant and future.

Aside from the positive opportunities it prevented from being seized (it was no coincidence that Grandi always boasted of having succeeded, through his disarmament policy, in pitting the French left against their own governments), the greatest risk of an ideological foreign policy lay in the fact that, sooner or later, it would inevitably lead to a head-on confrontation and a clash determined not by real and permanent interests but, precisely, by particular (and, according to his conception of fascism, temporary) ideological motives.

In his report of October 2, 1930, Grandi was explicit on this point:

What some have chosen to call Italy's new policy toward Soviet Russia is, after all, nothing new. One of the first achievements of Mussolini's foreign policy in the aftermath of the March on Rome was precisely the 1923 Italian-Soviet trade agreement and the establishment of normal diplomatic relations between Rome and Moscow.

Fascist Italy was the first European nation to establish normal relations with Russia, and it did so while the ruins of the communist organizations that fascism had destroyed were still smoldering in Italy. This was an act of courage and great wisdom that demonstrated that Italy did not intend then—just as it does

not intend today—to subordinate the nation's permanent interests to the interests of a political ideology.

Fascism is not—as Mussolini has said and repeated—an export commodity, nor has it ever intended to be a universal idea or even an ideology: it is simply a way of life for Italy; it aims to be the synthesis of our historical experiences, of the particular national aspirations and needs of our people and our lineage, it is intended to be exclusively Italian; it neither expects nor cares whether other countries wish to imitate it, especially since, as fascism is the typical and exclusive expression of the history and civilization of a specific people, any imitation that might be made by others cannot and will never be a faithful imitation of fascism.

Woe, however, to those regimes that base their international actions on a program of ideological expansion—that is, on the conflict between their own ideology and that of other regimes in other nations. This inevitably leads to religious war, and religious wars—as demonstrated by the tragic experience of the sixteenth century and, to some extent, that of the Napoleonic era—have bloodied Europe without achieving any purpose other than to bring human cruelty and ferocity to a fever pitch and to sow pain and misery throughout all nations.

In the concrete reality of the moment—both on the international stage and in the context of fascism—for Grandi, banishing ideological prejudices meant highlighting the absurdity of any policy that preached war while pursuing a policy of peace, or that preached peace while pursuing a policy of war; or of a policy that assessed the issue of peace and war in relation to the particular interests of a single country. The issue had to be assessed in its objective, unified, and global terms. If assessed in these terms, the answer could only be one:

peace is the overarching issue for the future of Europe and the world; the question, therefore, is what Italy's position should be—and will be—in this context.

While it is true that perpetual peace is an unattainable aspiration, it is equally true that there are long or short periods of peace, and that peace is—perhaps even more so than war—a laborious daily conquest that puts the flaws and virtues of peoples to the test no less than war does, and also demonstrates, no less than war, whether these peoples are truly worthy of greatness. The foremost duty of statesmen called upon to bear the responsibility of guiding the fate of nations is therefore to ensure for their peoples—as the greatest good—periods of peace that are as long and enduring as possible, devising and testing all possible remedies suggested by the wisdom and experience of politics and diplomacy. It is to address the evils afflicting the world before resorting to that terrible political problem—that extreme surgical remedy—which is war. Modern civilization itself, and particularly that of our century, has turned war into a biblical scourge, a terrifying one, unprecedented in human history.

On the other hand… peace—the so-called peace that in 1919 believed it had put an end to the world war—contains seeds so blatantly insidious and dangerous that they truly cast doubt on the stability of the current state of the world and seriously prompt us to reflect on whether, by any chance, what we have called peace is nothing more than an armistice. But a war today among the nations of Europe would result in nothing less than a massive, catastrophic civil war—a veritable decline and suicide of our old and glorious continent—with only one possible victor: Bolshevism and the fulfillment of Zinoviev's macabre prophecy: "Yesterday's war led to the victory of communism in Russia. The next war will lead to the victory of communism throughout Europe."

In light of this pessimistic yet realistic assessment of the international situation, Grandi believed that fascism—even though its tradition and mindset led it to move in a different and contrary direction—had to pursue a foreign policy of peace, disarmament, active collaboration with the League of Nations, and, at the very least, conciliation with the democratic powers.

This was the true revolutionary foreign policy that Fascist Italy could have pursued—a foreign policy that corresponded to Europe's general interests and that Italy could realistically afford at that time ("Large armies, powerful fleets, and vast air forces are, in the modern age of machinery, a direct product of wealth. Can Italy—rich in men but poor in material resources—compete on this front with the other great nations?"), which would have allowed it to "put itself in a position to present to the world the fundamental issue of Italian expansion, namely, our nation's right to exist"—this was the policy.

Along this path, there might be difficult moments, moments of isolation; yet these should not frighten Italy.

Only by pursuing this path with tenacity and consistency could Italy, in fact, acquire, on the one hand, a place and an autonomous role in international politics and, on the other hand, decisive influence within Europe, which would allow it to achieve its historical objectives—namely, the creation of a true colonial empire.

There is no doubt that, according to Grandi, Italy's destiny and greatness were to be realized in Africa; his political actions demonstrate this, and he himself affirmed it on numerous occasions in all forums.

In the Chamber of Deputies, at the conclusion of his final parliamentary speech as Foreign Minister on May 4, 1932; at the League of Nations; in his diplomatic conversations; and, much more explicitly, in the Grand Council on multiple occasions. In the oft-cited report of October 2, 1930, he said:

Africa remains the secret and enduring concern of the Italian nation. A strong Italy cannot remain forever clinging, as we are today in Eritrea, to the very edge of the Ethiopian plateau, or confined, as we are today in Somalia, to the Juba River and the stony deserts of the Ogaden. Our nation has a

civilizing mission to fulfill on the African continent, just as our generation has a problem to solve: the colonial problem. For us, this means resuming—in the face of the great powers that forged the Treaty of Versailles and disregarded Italy's rights—the discussion brutally interrupted in 1919 by Clemenceau, Wilson, and Lloyd George, a discussion that we nevertheless consider still open and far from settled.

This is the meaning and objective of Italy's foreign policy that we are pursuing, and it is to this meaning and this objective that not only our specific actions in East Africa, the Red Sea, Arabia, and the Indian Ocean must be related, but also our general political actions in Europe—and first and foremost, our confrontation with France.

And, again in the Grand Council, he reiterated the same concepts five months later, on March 5, 1931:

Italy's rights, aspirations, and claims in 1931—twelve years after the end of the World War—are the very same that Italy presented to its allies in 1919, not merely as the legitimate demands of a victorious nation, but as an urgent, vital necessity for Italy's survival. Italy needs new territories to resolve the problem of its scarcity of raw materials and its population surplus: these territories and these raw materials are in Africa.

It is in Africa, not in Europe, that we will be able to find the solution to our national problem.

It is about Africa that we intend to speak to France, asking that the discussions held at Versailles in 1919 be reopened in the name of justice, of harmony between Italy and France, and in the interest of peace in Europe.

His intellectual background and sensibilities led him, as we have seen, to turn his gaze above all toward Ethiopia; for him, as for much of Fascism, it was in fact in those lands that "national consciousness" awaited the realization of that colonial program "which our glorious and never-forgotten dead at Adwa, Macallé, and Amba Alagi point out to us like sleepless sentinels"; However, he did not rule out other possibilities either: as late as July 8, 1932, speaking in Geneva with the French Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Paganon, he raised once again the issue of Cameroon, so dear to certain circles within the Ministries of Colonies and Foreign Affairs. From this perspective, there is no doubt that Grandi shared the prevailing sentiment among the Fascists and, to a large extent, among the supporting liberal-nationalist ruling class.

Compared to most Fascists, however, his position differed in the specific foundation upon which this mindset was based. Various components can be identified in Grandi's ideological and cultural formation, some present mainly during certain periods, others permanent.

One, however, was decisive for him—especially with regard to the issue at hand—namely, the thought of Alfredo Oriani and, in particular, Oriani's understanding of Italy's place in Europe, its historical relations with other nations, and its role among them.

For fascism, Oriani was essentially the one who had recognized in the Risorgimento the beginning of the Italian people's rediscovery of their true spiritual values—values that the Great War and, above all, fascism had subsequently brought to fruition—and who, better than anyone else, had shown Italy its civilizing and colonizing mission in Africa.

Mussolini's position is typical in this regard:

even when times seemed darkest and the era of "staying at home" appeared to be the pinnacle of human wisdom, Alfredo Oriani dreamed of an empire. In an era when people believed in perpetual universal peace, Alfredo Oriani sensed that great storms were imminent and would upend the peoples of the entire world. In an era when the ruling classes displayed every kind of weakness—more or less innate—Alfredo Oriani was the champion of Italy, the regenerating spirit of the race.

Oriani's influence on Grandi was far more profound; one could almost say that—directly and sometimes even indirectly (through Missiroli's mediation)—it had shaped his entire personality and formed the basis of his vision of Italian foreign policy, merging into a single whole with two other motifs that were also very much alive in him (even if, on closer inspection, they were contradictory): the Metternichian motif (in the sense that foreign policy should not be subject to ideological influences and should be based solely on objective factors) and the Machiavellian motif (diplomacy as unscrupulous intrigue, guided solely by the end to be achieved).

Thus, for him, Oriani did not merely represent Africa and empire, but also, as we have said, a certain way of conceiving Italy's entire political strategy.

Adapting Oriani's insights regarding the late nineteenth century to the post-World War I reality, he believed that in Europe, Italy had an "immutable enemy" in Germany and a historical "affinity" (and a potential "invincible alliance") with France, and that it should strive for control of the Adriatic and, above all, for a policy of "absolute freedom" (with respect to the other great powers), which would open up a future "rich in great initiatives" for the country.

If we bear this conception of his in mind, we can understand what Grandi meant by a policy of decisive influence and the value he attributed to it.

At the level of political leadership, almost everyone—even those who spoke most frequently of the

“new Italian power”—was convinced that the realization of Italy’s colonial aspirations was tied to an agreement with France and England. Despite widespread anti-French sentiment and much talk of revisionism and Italian support for revisionist countries, very few people considered the possibility of a change in the European situation so radical as to allow Italy to establish an empire in opposition to France and England.

Apart from the fact that such a prospect was unrealistic at that time, even if the conditions for it were to arise in the future, it would have meant that German hegemony would replace French hegemony in Europe—a possibility that even the most ardent colonialists could not accept and that would have been extremely unpopular at home.

Even for the most unscrupulous nationalists and the most fanatical Francophobes, Italy’s revisionist policy had to aim, for the time being, ultimately—in addition to demonstrating that Italy was a great power—only at forcing France to meet Italy’s colonial demands, but always within the framework of a new relationship among the three great Western powers based on equality and friendship (anti-German for some, anti-German and anti-Soviet for others) rather than one of rupture.

Beyond colonial gains, Italy could, at most, have reaped some economic benefits from its revisionist policy in the Danube-Balkan region and—according to the most ardent nationalists—a change in the Yugoslav situation.

Mussolini had acted along these lines, and Grandi intended to continue doing so. Where Grandi’s position differed from Mussolini’s—and from the more varied stance of fascism as a whole—was in the significance and scope to be attributed to this approach.

Even assuming that France (and, behind it, England) would be forced to make concessions and that Italy could extend its colonial empire to certain regions that would satisfy not only its needs for power and prestige, its need for direct access to certain sources of raw materials and to find outlets for its surplus labor force (the idea of mass colonization that would absorb the growing national population and prevent the exodus of emigration was always the most important component of Italian colonialist ideology)—once this objective was achieved, what would have been the international future of Fascist Italy?

Even setting aside for the moment further, more ambitious “imperial” objectives—that is, leaving their realization to the “laws of history,” namely the “inevitable” decline of the “old” nations (namely France and England) and the emergence of the “young” ones (and, therefore, Italy), was it possible to imagine that at this point Fascism and Mussolini himself could practically give up on pursuing a foreign policy of their own—one distinct from that of the great democratic powers—and on establishing their own empire even in the “spiritual” realm?

And this, moreover, at a time when Fascism was being presented as a “new civilization”—one that, year after year, would be touted as the bearer of a new economic system capable of averting the evils of supercapitalism and communism, and as a phenomenon of “universal” value?

For Grandi, who viewed fascism as a transitory and exclusively Italian phenomenon, who wanted to avoid an intra-European conflict for fear that it would only benefit communism, and for whom the underlying perspective of Italy’s foreign policy was that outlined by Oriani, the answer to this set of

questions was simple.

Italy's foreign policy had to be a policy of national interest; therefore, in the short term, the goal had to be to compel France to accept, without too much national upheaval, Italy's demands regarding colonial matters; in the longer term, the goal had to be to make Italy the arbiter of the European status quo, reaping all the associated moral and material benefits from this position. A necessary condition for achieving both of these objectives—and, in any case, to prevent any potential conflict from placing Italy in the wake of another power or group of powers, was, ultimately, for Rome to maintain its autonomy and freedom of action intact, so that it could act as the deciding factor or, at the very least, freely choose its side based solely on its national interest—that is, on the advantages that would be offered to Italy to secure its decisive influence in the conflict.

Grandi returned to this concept repeatedly during his years as minister, with an insistence that reveals how it was, in practice, the cornerstone of his entire policy.

In the report of October 2, 1930, which has already been cited repeatedly, we read:

The Italian nation is not yet powerful enough—politically, militarily, and economically—to be considered a leading player in European affairs, as Russia and Germany undoubtedly have been in the recent history of our century and may once again become, and as France and Great Britain still are. Nevertheless, the Italian nation is already strong enough to constitute, through its political and military contribution, the decisive factor in the victory of one or the other of the protagonists in the European drama.

This is, therefore, a position of strength and prestige, a position open to all possibilities in the future—provided, of course, that Italy remains free to choose its own side in the event of a conflict, based on what it deems, at the appropriate moment, to be exclusively its vital national interests.

We are opposed to military alliances, because, as history demonstrates, they represent the gravest danger to peace: in fact, they are nothing more than opposing alignments of armed forces on the eve of a definitive and inevitable clash. Such have they always been, and such will they always be. We are opposed to all alliances—whether between Italy and other nations or among other nations themselves. Our conception of the European balance of power in the 20th century is profoundly different from that of the 19th century, which found its raison d'être in the formation of blocs of opposing powers.

The European balance as we conceive it—in our national interest and in the interest of all the large and small states of Europe—is precisely the same balance proclaimed by the Covenant of the League of Nations, which condemns alliances as a danger to peace and proclaims the equality of rights and duties of all states within the international community; any alteration of this balance among European nations is harmful to our country.

The same concept, albeit expressed more succinctly, is found in the report to the Grand Council a year later; however, the most significant references to it are those preserved in the reports and notes written for Mussolini. From these, the policy of “decisive influence” emerges in all its Machiavellian ruthlessness and realism, free from theoretical euphemisms and that veneer of political respectability with which Grandi felt the need to cloak it, even before the Grand Council. Two examples suffice to demonstrate this.

On August 31, 1930, as he was about to leave for Geneva to participate in the proceedings of the League of Nations, he wrote the following in a note to Mussolini:

My contacts with Marinkovich are the only thing of real interest that is taking me to Geneva. Everything else is of only mediocre interest. I do not believe that my meeting with Briand will shift the current situation of uncertainty in Italian-French relations by even a centimeter. This uncertainty must shift from an acute state to a chronic one.

That is where our interest lies. If the French seek us out, we will not refuse to discuss matters or perhaps reach an agreement (no friendship pacts, however, as you told me). But it must be “the French” who come looking for us. And they will come.

After the French will come the Germans. I am as certain of this as I am that I am alive.

All of this, in my view, will happen if we have the patience to wait.

Time is on our side. One day we will be the arbiters of the war on the Rhine. In the meantime, we must secure the highest possible standing in European continental politics.

We must engage in diplomacy and intrigue, applying Machiavelli a little more than we have done so far. The Treaty of Locarno, a piece of paper invented by democracy, can become in our hands the viper that bites the charlatan. Against everyone and against everything. We must arm ourselves and isolate ourselves more and more, so that we can sell ourselves at a high price in the hours of the great crisis to come.

And on May 17 of the following year, in a report from Geneva:

Italy is increasingly poised to become, between France and Germany, what I would call the “decisive factor.” The aim is, when the time is right, to make one side or the other pay us dearly. While awaiting that opportune moment, it seems to me that the course of action taken in Geneva these past few days is the most appropriate. Our conflict with France does not prevent us from opposing Germany. A possible conflict with Germany does not prevent us from opposing France.

We must demonstrate that our policy is not bound by the rule of three. Then we’ll see what happens tomorrow.

To properly assess these statements, one must consider that the realism and Machiavellianism with which they were formulated served, in part, to convince Mussolini to overcome his own distrust and ideological hostility toward institutions, formulas, and political solutions that he had always criticized and fought against, to support his policy, and to defend it against those fascists who accused him of “pacifism,” “disarmamentism,” “Locarnism,” “societarism,” “Europeanism”—in short, of capitulation to democratic ideologies and the Versailles system; In part, therefore, they were certainly instrumental and aimed—to use the words employed by Grandi in the aforementioned note of August 31, 1930—to convince Mussolini of the need for fascism to become accustomed “to distinguishing precisely between diplomacy and politics”:

This is the Religion of great truths; that is simply the art of deceiving the enemy, of preparing abroad—that is, among the enemies—the best conditions for waging war against them.

In part, however, they were also sincere and aligned well with Grandi’s conception of foreign policy. A conception that, in its effort to be non-ideological and guided solely by Italian national interests, inevitably led to actions which, on the one hand, ended up being—even while proceeding from a genuinely peaceful perspective—so unscrupulous as to appear, at times, even more ambiguous than they actually were, and, therefore, aroused at the European level, alongside much instrumental support, an equal amount of genuine suspicion; and, on the other hand, ultimately failed to resist the temptation to exploit the Machiavellian element to the fullest in a whole series of operations—not only specific and often quite minor ones that exacerbated its outward ambiguity but that were also at odds with

Grandi's own anti-ideological premise.

Typical in this regard is the ever-increasing development, during Grandi's tenure as minister—not only within the framework of "parallel diplomacy" but also of official diplomacy—of contacts and dealings with individuals and political groups considered, rightly or wrongly, to be pro-fascist (such as the Austrian Heimwehren and the Croats led by Ante Pavelic), in order to influence, through them, the politics of their countries and even to provoke outright internal upheavals.

Only within this context, in our view, is it possible to grasp the overall significance of Italian foreign policy and its various components during the Grandi administration, to assess both its results and the reasons for its abrupt termination in July 1932, and—above all, what is most relevant to our discussion—to understand Mussolini's attitude toward it.

Given what we have said, we do not believe there is much need to dwell on the overall significance of this policy. Although in-depth monographic studies on the period are still lacking, it is in fact easy to see that all of Grandi's policy decisions during these years were aimed at a single objective: to reach an agreement with Paris that "would extend to the entire range of issues affecting Italian-French relations" (and thus also include the normalization of Italian-Yugoslav relations) and to do so by putting France in a difficult position everywhere and by all means, undermining the foundations of its continental hegemony while at the same time making Italy a great, peaceful, and responsible power that proposed a policy not only alternative to the French one but also more modern—that is, more in line with the needs of the difficult political and economic moment Europe was going through and with the aspirations of both other states and broad sectors of international public opinion.

Along these lines, Grandi's efforts focused primarily on making Fascist Italy the standard-bearer of a new policy of peace based on disarmament.

This policy, in fact, was the one that offered fascism the greatest advantages at that particular moment. Financially, it allowed the regime to avoid tying up large sums in military spending that would otherwise have had to be diverted from Mussolini's ruralization projects and from efforts to mitigate the extremely severe consequences—as we have seen—of the Great Depression's spread to Italy.

Domestically, apart from the most rowdy fascists, it aligned with the Italian people's general desire for peace and thus played no small part in preventing the discontent sparked by the economic situation from being channeled—or from spontaneously turning—toward anti-fascism.

On the international front, it also served excellently to consolidate good relations with England, especially given the presence of the Labour Party in government—which was, on the one hand, anti-fascist but, on the other, pacifist, and, deep down, far from inclined to deviate from the Foreign Office's traditional stance on relations with Italy.

Nor can one underestimate the sympathy and common ground that this policy generated in the United States: the care that Grandi took during these years to cultivate the best possible relations with the State Department and his cordial ties—including personal ones—with Stimson are highly significant in this regard.

And, although far less significant, the same can be said of the good relations with the USSR, if only because of the confusion they caused within the communist camp and the controversies they provoked between official communists and dissidents.

Likewise, one certainly cannot overlook the advantages (which Grandi symptomatically cited on several occasions in his debates with critics and opponents within the Fascist movement to defend the tactical soundness of his policy) that this policy provided to Fascism on the propaganda front (both domestically and internationally), directly undermining, at least partially, a certain assessment of Fascism itself and indirectly putting a whole segment of European democratic anti-Fascism in a difficult position, as it found itself de facto adopting positions seemingly similar to those of Fascist Italy (and in France even arguing against its own government using arguments not very different from those of the Fascists).

According to the logic of Grandi's strategy, however, the greatest advantage lay in the fact that every point scored in favor of disarmament was a blow to French hegemony in Europe; this, skillfully balanced with moderate revisionism, would proportionally increase Italy's decisive influence and force France to seek an agreement with it.

Grandi was not wrong in his conviction that, after Versailles, French hegemony in Europe had taken on a very particular character; in practice, it was based on the assertion that France's security was necessary not only for France itself but for all those countries that had reason to fear German revanchism. Hence the need for France to be the leading European military power and to guarantee the continental status quo, using all means to this end: its military and economic power, its direct and indirect political and moral influence—that is, through the League of Nations—and, indeed, the myth of European security, which was identified with French security, so that all countries had to cooperate with it and thus recognize its hegemony. Undermining the assumption that European security rested on French security therefore meant undermining Paris's hegemony. There was only one way to do this: to assert the principle that European security could not rest on French security, both because it would always be precarious—given that the status quo prevented the elimination of a whole series of causes of national resentment and conflict—and because it would inevitably lead to an arms race that the peoples could neither accept nor afford, especially during such a dramatically difficult economic period.

On the contrary, European security—and thus peace—could be based only on general disarmament and on the return of the League of Nations to its true original character, that is, before French and, to a lesser extent, British hegemony had taken hold over it. This would have allowed all European states to participate in it and to find within it the peaceful resolution of their problems, first and foremost those arising from the peace treaties that had brought an end to the 1914–18 war.

As for Italy, by championing this policy, it would have achieved a twofold success; in terms of power, it would automatically have become the deciding factor, the decisive counterweight between the two potentially hegemonic powers, France and Germany; in moral terms, it would have exposed French democracy, showing Europe how Paris's "societal pacifism" and Léon Bourgeois's assertion at Versailles that "les frontières de la France sont les frontières de la liberté" were nothing more than ploys to disguise France's desire to dominate Europe and bend it to its own exclusive interests.

The first arena in which this strategy unfolded was the London Naval Conference (January 21–April 22, 1930). In 1921–22, at the Washington Naval Conference on arms limitation, the five major naval powers had reached an agreement aimed at preventing—at least for battleships and aircraft carriers—an arms race, by establishing a fixed ratio among their fleets. The agreed-upon ratio was: the United States and England 5, Japan 3, France and Italy 1.67 for battleships and 2.22 for aircraft carriers.

Although limited to major vessels, the agreement had thus established parity between the French and Italian fleets. In the following years, various attempts were made to extend the negotiations to the rest of the surface fleet and to submarines, but without concrete results.

However, in the new climate shaped by the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Labour Party's rise to power in England, and the Hoover-MacDonald agreements, in October 1929 the British and Americans decided that the time had come to revive the issue of disarmament and invited the other three signatory powers of the Washington Treaty to meet in London for this purpose.

Italy, which had declined a similar invitation two years earlier, was the first to accept. As the proceedings of the London Conference demonstrated, the occasion was in fact an excellent opportunity for Mussolini and Grandi to put their new "active" policy into practice.

Aside from the fact that for Mussolini and Grandi—as indeed for the entire Fascist movement— naval parity with France was a matter of principle on which there could be no compromise—both because they were convinced that "the rank of nations is determined by the power of their respective fleets" and because it was inconceivable to them that Fascist Italy could be considered on a lower level than that accorded to liberal Italy—the opportunity to put France in a difficult position was too good to pass up.

Since Paris was absolutely opposed to reaffirming and extending parity with Italy and had launched a naval program that clearly demonstrated this, but could neither state this explicitly nor, much less, present itself as the only power unwilling to disarm (so much so that it justified its naval program and its refusal of parity with the geographical argument that it needed to ensure its presence in various seas, whereas Italy had only the Mediterranean to worry about), the Italian position was very straightforward.

As Rome made clear even before the conference began—and as Grandi consistently reiterated throughout its proceedings—Italy did not deny France's security needs. In any category of armaments —naval, land-based, or air—France was free to set the levels it deemed most appropriate, even the lowest, if it wished to pursue a genuine policy of disarmament; the Italian government was "ready to accept a priori any figures as the limit on its own armaments, even the lowest, provided they were not exceeded by any other European continental power."

Framed in this way, the Italian position cast France in a negative political light and created difficulties for it with the other great powers: for if Paris demanded too high a limit for itself (claiming that these were its imperial necessities), this would—given the underlying balance of power among the various fleets—inevitably set in motion a wave of new shipbuilding by the United States, Britain, and Japan (as well as Italy), and the conference, instead of disarmament, would have enshrined rearmament.

This explains why, despite the intensity of the Italian-French confrontation during the London talks and the failure of the conference regarding the part of the final agreement that was supposed to concern France and Italy, Grandi and Mussolini regarded the "battle" was regarded as an Italian political victory and a blow dealt to "false" pacifism and France's claims to European hegemony.

Undoubtedly, the other powers would have preferred (and worked hard to achieve) a more "understanding" attitude on Italy's part. Equally undoubtedly, however, Italy emerged from the London conference politically strengthened, for while its stance had been, on the one hand—as a matter of principle—intransigent (and legally sound, given the precedent set in Washington), on the other hand, it had been moderate and conciliatory with regard to the search for a solution that, while formally

preserving parity, would promote arms limitation or, at the very least, allow for a moratorium on shipbuilding for a few years.

This was all the more true because—once the conference had ended—negotiations continued precisely along this latter path, and if no agreement was reached on March 1, 1931, based on the moratorium, it was solely due to France, which, having first (under British and American pressure) had accepted it and then immediately called it into question, citing clearly untenable arguments that certainly did not win it sympathy or support, either internationally or from broad sectors of its own public opinion.

Throughout 1930 and 1931, Grandi pursued a line very similar to the one he had initiated in London in other international forums as well (the League of Nations, the General Disarmament Conference, etc.); however, the overall political results achieved were less significant, even though the approval in September 1931 of Grandi's proposal for a one-year moratorium on the manufacture of all types of weapons was undeniably a success for Italy.

In theory, this approach objectively aimed to advance disarmament policy in concrete terms; in the long run, however, it was inevitable that it would show its true colors—that is, reveal the self-serving agenda that fundamentally drove it.

In its conflict with France, Italy may well have been in the right; but as the months passed and the international situation deteriorated, the issue for many countries increasingly became a different one: what was the actual benefit that Italy's anti-French policy brought to the cause of peace, at a time when the threat of a resurgence of German nationalism and revanchism was beginning to appear not as a distant prospect, but as an imminent possibility?

This was all the more true because, in order to put pressure on France, Italy simultaneously opposed virtually every "hegemonic" initiative by Paris—such as Briand's proposal to create a sort of European Federal Union—and took the opportunity to establish cooperation with Germany within the League of Nations, supporting Germany's demands for the revision of the peace treaties and for absolute equality of rights; and even when it was forced to take a stand against Berlin—as in the case of the proposed Austro-German customs union (a sort of pre-Anschluss)—it took care to differentiate its position from that of France, thereby weakening the anti-German front in the long run.

And, as if that weren't enough, he immediately set about dispelling any suspicion among the Germans that the unfortunate incident might have negatively affected relations between Rome and Berlin (a visit to Rome by Chancellor Brüning and Minister Curtius in early August 1931 and, above all, Grandi's visit to Berlin at the end of the following October) and to convince them that it was in Germany's interest to view the possibility of cooperation with Italy more favorably than it had up to that point.

It was no coincidence that, just as Grandi was in Berlin, Mussolini in Naples felt the need to speak out—once again publicly—in favor of the cancellation of reparations and war debts, of legal equality among nations (between states "armed to the teeth," that is, France, and those "condemned to be defenseless," that is, Germany), and for the revision of the peace treaties—thus supporting the fundamental demands put forward by Germany.

Thus, in the final analysis, Guariglia (who accompanied Grandi to Berlin) was right when he wrote that—despite its formally innocuous and exploratory nature—Grandi's visit to Berlin in October 1931 "was in reality the first step toward Germany taken by Italy after the 1914–18 war."

A cautious step, to be sure, just as Grandi's conception of revisionism was cautious—one intended more to frighten France than to encourage Germany—but one that, at that moment, could not help but cast yet another cloud over the already troubled international horizon and could not fail to be perceived by most, at best, as a maneuver, a "waltz" through which Italy, for its own particularistic ends, risked making the path toward a general agreement even slower and more difficult.

Still speaking in general terms, if one considers all this and keeps firmly in mind the series of decisive political events that took place in Europe and beyond between mid-1931 and mid-1932—particularly in connection with the worsening of the global economic situation (the fall of the Labour government, the formation of the government of national unity, and the end of the gold standard in England; the Japanese invasion of China in Manchuria; the presidential elections, with the subsequent runoff between Hindenburg and Hitler, and the subsequent formation of the Papen government in Germany, the electoral victory of the left, and the formation of Herriot's Radical-Socialist government in France), one can easily see how, during this period, the margins of credibility for Italian foreign policy gradually narrowed and, above all, the level of understanding and tolerance toward it on the part of the United States and especially England—that is, the two powers most interested (for a whole series of objective and particularistic reasons) in breaking the deadlock in which the disarmament negotiations had become bogged down and in halting the progressive deterioration of the European political situation—began to diminish. In this context, in fact, Italy's prompt acceptance at the General Conference on Disarmament of the U.S. arms reduction proposal presented on April 11, 1932, took on a value that was almost purely theoretical and propagandistic, given that, since France had not in turn accepted the proposal, the negotiations soon ran aground once again on the technical means by which to implement the arms reduction, and at this stage the Italian side raised again (during the discussion on aerial disarmament) the preliminary issue of parity with France.

And this occurred at a time when, on top of everything else, British and American policymakers were primarily focused on bringing the conference to a successful conclusion in some way, in order to use its "success" to sway American public opinion and make it less resistant to accepting the now-inevitable decision—if one wished to try to stem the economic crisis afflicting Germany and Europe—to cancel reparations and war debts.

And the same, on closer inspection, can be said of the statement in which, on June 22 in Geneva, Grandi accepted "in its entirety, without distinction," the plan-appeal presented—in a last-ditch attempt to prevent the conference from failing—by the U.S. representative on behalf of President Hoover.

With that declaration, in fact, Grandi did indeed accept the American plan (though only after the British had expressed reservations, the Germans had reiterated their demand for equal rights with other countries, and the French had practically dismissed the plan as simplistic and demanded that their proposals be examined first), but he also outlined the measures that, in his view, should have resulted from it.

In practice, this meant he was reiterating the proposals he had already put forward in February and April—proposals that France, even under Herriot, was unwilling to accept.

The consequences of this stance—ostensibly driven by a desire to pursue a genuinely peaceful policy, but in reality always aimed at putting France in a difficult position—were not long in coming.

From June 16 to July 7, concurrently with the Geneva disarmament negotiations, a conference was held in Lausanne to seek a solution to Germany's economic situation and, in particular, to the issue of

reparations that Germany still owed but claimed it could no longer pay.

The conference—as is well known—concluded (except for a “final” payment of three billion gold marks) with a clean slate on reparations and a commitment to find, within the following year, a satisfactory solution to the related problem of inter-Allied war debts.

Viewed from the perspective of Italian politics, this solution certainly could not be considered a success; to say, as was also claimed, that it was a complete failure would, however, be an exaggeration, even if one cannot overlook the fact that, given its nature and its need for prestige, what for another regime would have represented only a partial success (and, moreover, one with considerable prospects of being completed in the near future) constituted for the Fascist regime, without a doubt, almost a setback, especially domestically.

While it was indeed true that, up to that point, France had never been willing to consider ending reparations, it was also true that, since 1922, Fascist policy had always been based on the inseparability of reparations and war debts, and Mussolini had even recently vigorously defended this position in two articles in *Il Popolo d’Italia*, which the regime’s propaganda had promoted to the fullest extent. The postponement of the war debt issue to future negotiations was therefore a political setback for Fascist Italy, one that was only partially offset by the success achieved on the reparations front.

If we add to this the concerns raised in various Italian political and economic circles by the fear of the difficulties that—at a time already so critical for Italy’s finances—might have arisen from the failure or excessive prolongation of the negotiations regarding the settlement of the war debt issue, it becomes clear why the regime could hardly present the Lausanne agreements to the Italian public as its own success and even feared that they might even give rise to the idea that its foreign policy had, in practice, worked solely “for the King of Prussia.”

But this was, in a sense, still the lesser evil. The rise to power of the left in France under Herriot had, on the one hand, somewhat softened Paris’s intransigence on the issue of disarmament; on the other, it had heightened awareness of the growing German threat, leading to a new and more concrete determination to establish around Germany a solid system of states interested in keeping its revanchist ambitions in check.

An essential element of this system was to be a solid Franco-Anglo-American alliance. Another element was to be a Franco-Soviet rapprochement, which, incidentally, had already been initiated by Laval in the preceding months.

As for Italy—whose influence in this framework was undoubtedly waning—while on the one hand Herriot did not rule out reaching an agreement with it as well and making some limited concessions (primarily of an economic and financial nature), on the other hand Italy first had to clearly choose a side; as the semi-official newspaper *Le Temps* wrote on June 3, it had to renounce any “collusion with the powers of anarchy and disorder.”

In other words, according to Herriot, Italy had to align itself with France, because only within the French system could it find its own security in the face of Germany and, as usual, it had to essentially consider itself satisfied with that. Its “legitimate aspirations” would be discussed at a later date: for now, it had to align itself with Paris, London, and Washington and adhere to their policy of containing Germany.

Faced with this firm French stance, Grandi had sought—and continued to seek until the very end—to give concrete form to the discussion regarding Italy's "legitimate aspirations" and to translate it into something akin to a commitment regarding the "colonial question."

In Lausanne, however, the situation had suddenly deteriorated, and a new political development had occurred that was extremely serious both for fascism and, above all, for its policy: the Anglo-French rapprochement took concrete form and resulted in a joint initiative by the two powers to propose to Italy, Germany, and Belgium (as signatories to the Locarno Pact, though at the time it was not even clear whether the proposal would eventually be extended to all European states) a consultative pact aimed at resolving, in the same spirit as the Lausanne agreements, the European political and economic issues at hand, including disarmament.

The renewal of close Anglo-French cooperation (officially announced on July 14) was, for Italy, an undeniable and serious setback, which—depending on one's perspective—could be viewed as more or less dramatic, but which certainly could not fail to entail a revision of the policy pursued until then by Grandi and the fading of many hopes (which, as we shall see, had blossomed over the past year) tied to its success.

Even assuming that the Consultative Pact did not end up reviving—as was initially feared—the idea of a European federal union proposed by Briand two years earlier (which would inevitably have further strengthened French hegemony), there is no doubt that the renewed Anglo-French cooperation (established bilaterally and only subsequently extended, through the proposal for the consultative pact, to Italy, Germany, and Belgium) introduced a new procedure for addressing European issues, effectively making their resolution contingent upon prior agreement between London and Paris.

Aside from the question of prestige—so important to Mussolini—this meant a weakening of Italian-British friendship and, above all, a very serious reduction in the scope for maneuver in Italian foreign policy; and this, moreover, in a context that marked a significant strengthening of Germany's position (to which, moreover, France—willingly or unwillingly—was beginning to signal its intention no longer to deny Germany equal rights, which, in fact, were theoretically recognized less than five months later).

In other words, it meant the failure—or, at the very least, the postponement, for who knows how long, of the possibility of forcing Paris to come to terms with Rome on the latter's terms.

A series of new developments as serious as these could not fail to have equally serious consequences.

The first was the announcement, on July 21, that Mussolini had resumed control of Italian foreign policy and, a week later, the appointment of Grandi as ambassador to London.

In 1944, in *Storia di un anno* (*The Story of a Year*), Mussolini devoted these few—and not even precise (see the reference to the Four-Power Pact)—much less dispassionate—lines to Grandi's removal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; these lines, moreover, constitute his only written statement on the matter:

After having headed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for many years, he was replaced.

Why? By frequenting Geneva assiduously, he had somewhat blended into that treacherous environment. His stance had by then become “societary.” There is no doubt that he had made a name for himself in the international arena. He had visited nearly all European capitals, including Ankara. He was considered a man of democratic leanings, a right-wing figure in Fascist foreign policy. The government’s stance, following the failure of the Four-Power Pact, had diverged. One day he was replaced and sent as ambassador to London. One might think that from that moment on he began to harbor a resentment that would take him far. However, he kept it carefully hidden.

The final judgment is certainly largely influenced by the events of July 25 and the role Grandi played in them.

The part of the passage that interests us here, however, essentially corresponds to what R. Cantalupo recounted Mussolini having told him in 1932 to explain Grandi’s removal:

Mussolini said that Grandi had gotten everything wrong, in three years, everything: he had allowed himself to be held captive by the League of Nations, had pursued a pacifist and social policy, had acted as an ultra-democrat and a super-Genevan, had taken Italy off the rigid track of a selfish and realistic policy, had embraced some of the ambitions of the new generation, had “gone to bed with England and France, and since those were the men involved, Italy had been left ‘pregnant with disarmament,’ and our foreign policy was now devoid of freedom of action.

We had been abandoned on a dead-end track from which he, Mussolini, would have to pull us out. It would take him a few years to remedy Grandi’s “deleterious and democratic activity,” but he would succeed. Meanwhile, Europe was restless and turbulent; he did not foresee a peaceful near future at all, “perhaps war was brewing spontaneously,” and around 1940 the crucial hour for Italy would arrive (here Mussolini’s face grew very serious and almost contorted, and his eyes became not cloudy but filled with dismay, somber and fixed).

Would Italy remain neutral? Would it intervene?… Mussolini described this future reality in advance, using extremely vivid language, painting an ideological, economic, and military picture of Europe dominated by the inevitability of the conflict between the old world and the new, between conservatism and socialism, between East and West, between individualism and collectivism.

London at the head of one side, Moscow in command of the other, Italy possibly acting as a mediator in the furious struggle between capital and labor, between freedom and dictatorship. He did not attribute a role of great importance to America; he considered it uninterested in the evolution of the modern

world… He had predicted the end of parliamentarianism, “which will be strangled by communism where communism triumphs, and elsewhere by the need to oppose communism”: did I not understand that a world was about to collapse and a new century was about to dawn? Did the Western democracies not realize this, and did they believe in good faith that they—and they alone—could represent and embody the present and the future? Deluded, foolish, old fools, too rich in the past and in gold, too poor in new ideas! Communism, fascism, nationalism, socialism: a synthesis of all these would emerge in the world precisely from the war.

Why shouldn’t Italy—Latin and Catholic, more balanced and selfless than others—be the one to attempt this on the historical stage? Let us be on guard; the great hour was near: Fascism, which had opened the world’s eyes to the need to reconcile capital and labor, would bring peace to the world. One thing would be necessary on that day: for Italy to have at its disposal men who were internationally accepted. For while other states and other ideologies—on both the right and the left—would represent the extremes and come into conflict over the irreconcilable nature of the plutocratic monopoly and the dictatorship of the proletariat, Fascism would offer everyone, through the corporatist system and a state-directed economic structure, the only possible platform for reconciliation.

We have dwelled on this quotation because it offers various elements not only to clarify the criticisms Mussolini leveled at Grandi, but also to understand the ideological implications of these criticisms and their significance with respect to the shift that the Duce imposed on Italian foreign policy by removing Grandi from Palazzo Chigi.

The “official” reason for Grandi’s resignation—which circulated at a “confidential” political level and which Mussolini had to convey to Grandi himself (who, in turn, relayed it to the new chief of staff at the Foreign Ministry, Baron Pompeo Aloisi)—was that he had failed to prevent the Anglo-French agreement at Lausanne.

In reality, this reason was merely a pretext, intended to place the blame solely on Grandi for a responsibility he actually shared with Mussolini, and to provide Mussolini with the opportunity to change course while even posing as the savior of the situation.

This change of course, however, while desired by the Duce, took place with the consent and contribution of at least two other powerful forces: a substantial sector of the Fascist leadership and a significant portion of the “career” officials.

The “careerists” in the strict sense carried the least weight; their contribution, however, cannot be underestimated, especially when one considers the influence that—as will be seen—their stance had on the subsequent evolution of Mussolini’s foreign policy.

Nor can it be overlooked that it was precisely this group that, through its excessive concerns, endorsed the accusation that Grandi had jeopardized Italy’s international standing.

That the Anglo-French agreement of Lausanne aroused widespread concern and an unconsulted

reaction among a large part of the “career” diplomatic corps can be documented primarily (but not exclusively) on the basis of the aforementioned analysis of Grandi’s foreign policy sent to Mussolini in the form of a comprehensive memorandum by an authoritative Italian diplomat (in our opinion, Leonardo Vitetti) from The Hague as soon as the first news of the agreement leaked out.

This segment of the “careerist” class (with a more or less nationalist and Contarini-inspired background) had identified with Grandi’s policy and supported it with conviction, above all because it saw in it the means to achieve what was most dear to its heart and toward which it had directed its efforts even before Fascism came to power: securing a colonial empire for Italy.

For the rest, regarding the means by which to achieve this goal, she was, deep down, even more unscrupulous and Machiavellian than Grandi and, above all, far more willing than he was to underestimate the new realities that—compared to traditional prewar politics—were represented, on the one hand, by the League of Nations and, on the other, by the growing influence of public opinion.

Moreover, for about a year by then, she had become convinced that, thanks to Grandi’s policy, France was moving toward acceding to Italy’s colonial demands and that, therefore, obtaining a green light in Africa was, for Italy, practically only a matter of time—especially if Italy did not let up and continued to press France.

Underlying this conviction were certain facts that were undoubtedly not without significance, which attested to how the idea was gaining ground within the French political class—especially among certain politicians less tied to the dominant ideologies of the 1920s—that an agreement with Italy was necessary.

In particular, certain statements by one of the most interesting and, at the same time, controversial rising stars of French political life—Pierre Laval, Prime Minister from January 1931 to February 1932—had caused quite a stir at Palazzo Chigi.

In private conversations with Ambassador Manzoni and other Italian diplomats, Laval had expressed his conviction that a Franco-Italian understanding was desirable; he had spoken of Mussolini with a degree of understanding for his actions that the Italian ambassador said he had not encountered in any other French politician; and he had hinted that he would be very pleased to travel to Rome to meet with the Duce and “come to an understanding” with him.

With Grandi, in mid-July 1931, he had gone even further. He had reiterated his “firm intention” to reach an agreement with Italy, and—when Grandi replied that it was necessary “first and foremost to give Italy a concession that would allay our legitimate concerns once and for all and compensate us, even if only in the slightest degree, for the bitter disappointments we have suffered”—he had interrupted him, saying, “Ethiopia, for example….” These three words, above all, had stirred up a great deal of excitement at Palazzo Chigi and led many to believe that France was finally preparing to take Italy’s colonial demands into consideration—albeit with the intention of satisfying them at the expense of Ethiopia rather than at the expense of its own colonial empire.

Grandi had reported this overture by Laval to Mussolini in a very measured letter from Geneva on July 25. As soon as he heard the news, however, Guariglia hastened to write to Grandi in enthusiastic terms, building an entire political-colonial action plan around those three words—a document that is essential for understanding the inner reality, the prospects, and the political sensibilities of broad sectors of the “career” diplomatic corps:

I do not believe that Laval—who is not a diplomat and is new to foreign policy and its maneuverings—intends for his explicit and repeated references to take on the character of Mr. Briand's usual vague proposals.

I believe, rather, that for the first time in France, a politician of responsibility and power has come to realize the utility, the advantage, and—I will go further—the vital necessity for France to reach an agreement with Italy. My conviction is that President Laval is determined to give his country's foreign policy a more vigorous, more realistic, less conciliatory, and indeed more assertive character—in order to keep the German threat in check, tomorrow even more so than today, and to maintain for France the position that the victorious war has secured for it in the world.

To carry out this program of vigorous policy—which, depending on one's perspective, might be called conservative or hegemonic, pacifist or bellicose—he has realized that the Italian question must be resolved.

Italy, which—although on substantive issues it has so far been compelled by its own interests to ultimately side with France—nevertheless, with its autonomous policy, its ever-present opposition to French designs, the sympathies it has shown toward German nationalist elements, and its stance that, in recent conferences, has served to strip France of its mask of collaboration and disarmament, Italy—which, ultimately, could even become a potential ally of a Germany seeking "revanche"—undoubtedly constitutes today a serious, if not the greatest, obstacle to achieving the aforementioned goals…

My personal view is that a modest agreement on what has come to be called the "pending issues" would not be advantageous for us… I believe, on the contrary, that a broad and comprehensive Italian-French agreement would be of the utmost benefit to our interests at this political juncture.

I am firmly convinced that if we could obtain from France the Adriatic guarantee, Yugoslav recognition of our position in Albania, the substantial cession of Djibouti and a free hand in Abyssinia, as well as recognition of special positions in the East, we could without any hesitation bring the Libyan question to a close and secure the liberation of Tunisia under our proposal (territorial compensation for Djibouti): a guarantee for the western Mediterranean and a naval agreement that would grant France some satisfaction; and finally, we could forge a broad agreement that would, above all, have far-reaching economic implications, along with provisions for dual citizenship that would allow us to make concessions regarding Tunisia without committing an act of abandonment toward those valiant compatriots of ours.

An agreement of this kind would have such an impact on public opinion in both countries that the exile movement would be severely weakened, and the campaign for denationalization—whatever political solution might be reached—would be significantly dampened for some time.

An agreement of this kind would constitute, for a certain number of years, a significant—perhaps radical—shift in our policy.

It is obvious that for a few years a fairly close collaboration would be established between Italy and France, which would represent a softening of the policy of independence we have followed thus far.

But we must consider that the policy based on the positions established by the Treaty of Locarno—which is, in essence, a policy of close cooperation with England to maintain the balance of power—is becoming increasingly uncertain in the current British situation, which oscillates between the Labour Party, which pursues a rather strong pro-German policy, and the Conservative Party—which is fully in agreement with the Foreign Office on returning to power to strike a deal with France—but above all because of Great Britain's current weakness and France's strength.

But even setting that aside, it seems to me that a five-year period of industrious reflection, a steady and profitable policy, is what our country needs today.

A five-year or ten-year period of productive peace at home without serious foreign concerns… At the same time, with our backs secure (Russia and Germany will not be in a position to harm us for years to come), we must complete our work in Albania, bring the King and his sycophants—who constantly blackmail us, emboldened by the international weakness of our position in their country—to heel, and unite the small Albanian state forever with the life and security of Italy.

But above all, we must begin our penetration into Ethiopia on a new footing, with a serious chance of success, since we will no longer face the cold, hostile hand of France at every turn.

I know what objections might be raised. In Ethiopia, ever since the time of Aida, there have been Ethiopians. I could reply that in India, Morocco, or Annam, things were no different, apart from race and color.

It is certain that Abyssinia is the only demographic and economic outlet still open to us. To penetrate it, we need money—to take it, probably war. But nothing in this world comes without effort and hard work. If we want the Empire, we must earn it.

In any case, the two advantages I mentioned, combined with an immediate territorial gain and the opportunities that would open up in the East (I am leaving aside the greater prospects in Anatolia, though they should not be forgotten), convince me that such an agreement would be so beneficial to us as to fully justify the concessions we would make in return.

And I believe that the new political direction I mentioned would not be a change, but a successful culmination of our policy and our anti-French stance.

To succeed, without war, in convincing the adversary that concessions are necessary—what greater success could there be? Nor can I imagine anything better that our country could hope for in the years to come.

What better destiny could there be for the generation of war and fascism, for Mussolini's Italy, than to lay, over the course of a decade of hard work, the foundations of an African empire; to wash away the last stain that still defiles our name and our flag—that of Adwa; and to secure for all time our access to and security on the opposite shore of the Adriatic?

Another objection, however, might be raised against me: that by doing so, we would reinforce French hegemony.

My response is this: first of all, French hegemony is welcome if they give us Djibouti, guarantee us Albania and the Adriatic, allow us to penetrate Ethiopia, and do not take the Eastern Mediterranean from us!

Second, French hegemony cannot last in Europe, simply because 80 million Germans, by sheer force of numbers alone, make it impossible without an agreement with Italy.

In any case, an agreement with France—even as far as our prestige is concerned—while it may diminish it somewhat in the eyes of a nation for which the title of “eldest daughter” has always held a special allure, will nevertheless place us in a far better position vis-à-vis all the other great powers. Faced with France and Italy in agreement, the Anglo-Saxon powers would have no choice but to give up on imposing their will.

One final consideration in favor of an agreement with France. A single grave, if not fatal, danger threatens the future of our country: the Anschluss. An agreement with France would delay it for as long as the agreement lasts—except, of course, in the event of war, which would have to be a victory for Germany.

A remote possibility, therefore.

It is objected: it is inevitable. It must happen. It will happen, in peacetime, only if France and Italy allow it. In any case, it is better to have the Germans at the Brenner Pass—and their presence in the Adriatic—as late as possible; and if there is nothing else to be done, to try to make them pay the highest possible price, since they currently have nothing to pay with; to delay them, in the worst-case scenario, at least until we have resolved the Albanian issue and thoroughly addressed the Ethiopian one, so that our primary concern may be defense and no longer expansion.

There is no doubt that Laval—a politician as much a realist and unscrupulous as any other, and well aware of the danger that Germany would soon pose to France—was considering an agreement with Italy and realized that, in order to come to terms with Mussolini, it would be necessary to grant him substantial colonial advantages.

Even if we lacked other evidence, his agreements with Mussolini in January 1935 prove this. Nor, for that matter, was this merely his opinion: in 1931, various other French politicians and numerous influential media outlets were leaning—or were beginning to lean—in the same direction.

On the whole, however, French public opinion and the major political forces themselves were not yet ready for such a significant shift, which would have entailed—even psychologically—a complete reevaluation of French policy from the end of the war (at least) onward and which could not fail to have repercussions on the majority of French people’s view of fascism.

Grandi had understood this; in fact, he had not altered his policy in response to Laval’s overtures. The same, however, probably cannot be said of that segment of the “careerists” who had welcomed these overtures with such enthusiasm.

This explains—in our view—how, when Herriot became Prime Minister in June 1932 and had also

made some vague references to a desirable Franco-Italian agreement, on the one hand, the hopes of the "careerists" immediately revived, while, on the other hand, the disappointment over the Anglo-French agreement at Lausanne constituted a veritable trauma for them.

All the more so because—unlike the previous year—this time even Grandi must have believed that the chances of an agreement had increased, and he had staked everything on them in an attempt to save his policy and his position as minister; he had shown that he considered negotiations with Paris to be imminent, to the point of speaking publicly about "Italy's destiny in Africa" in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate and, above all, of initiating— "under his personal responsibility" (that is, without Mussolini's prior authorization)—discussions along these lines with Herriot and Paganon.

In reality, in 1932 the chances of a Franco-Italian agreement on the terms desired by Rome were no greater than in 1931, and Herriot was not a man to risk his prestige among the left-wing parties in an operation that did not seem particularly urgent at that moment and that a rapprochement with England might make it possible to avoid even in the future.

For much of its "career," Italy—frightened by the isolation to which the Anglo-French agreement threatened to reduce it, dazzled by the idea of being able to get its hands on Ethiopia (and, perhaps, even more—recall Guariglia's letter to Grandi from the previous year), and terrified by the prospect of a strong resurgence of Germany— the agreement with France had by then become a sort of dogma—the panacea of Italian foreign policy that would allow it to realize its long-dreamed-of colonial empire while simultaneously shielding it from the German threat.

Hence the Vitetti memorandum with its dramatic call to "immediately set about vigorously rebuilding our foreign policy, while we are still in a position to do so, and before Imperial Germany forces us into positions of necessity in which we will be compelled to sacrifice the vital needs of our expansion."

A request that, on the surface, might have been interpreted as aiming merely to invigorate the central aspect of Grandi's policy (whose name, significantly, was never mentioned throughout the memorandum, even though, obviously, the entire argument was a critique of his policy) but which, in reality, completely distorted its entire meaning (and certainly not for the better), since, in essence, it set aside the theory of decisive influence and, in order to reach an agreement with France that would allow Italy to carry out its colonial expansion, took for granted the perpetuation of French hegemony in Europe (among other things, through a radical revision of Italian policy toward the Little Entente) and also entrusted the realization of Italy's colonial aspirations to a bilateral agreement to be concluded practically outside the rights acquired under the Treaty of London, outside the European security system (for better or worse centered on the League of Nations), and outside the territories under French sovereignty or mandate—an agreement that would therefore inevitably further weaken this system and encourage other revisionist movements to disregard it as well.

In this way, the "career" not only objectively contributed to providing a faction within fascism and Mussolini with further grounds to remove Grandi from Palazzo Chigi, but it also took a strong, direct stance in favor of a foreign policy entirely centered on the objective of Ethiopia and, indirectly, in favor of a foreign policy that sought to resolve international problems outside and in opposition to the League of Nations, returning as much as possible to a European system founded on the decisive role of the four great powers.

While the "Carriera" served, in Grandi's removal from Palazzo Chigi, as a technical endorsement of Mussolini's decision (regarding both the criticism of the policy pursued up to that point and the

formulation of the one subsequently launched with the July 1932 shift), the criticisms and accusations leveled at Grandi from within the Fascist movement provided the Duce with that ideological endorsement, the echo of which is evident in his words to Cantalupo.

Even setting aside personal jealousies and grudges, there is no doubt that the majority of the Fascist movement had not so much accepted as endured Grandi's policies—and only because they were approved by Mussolini and presented to them partly as a necessity and partly as a Machiavellian expedient from which Italy and Fascism would derive concrete benefits.

And if it had been able to, it would have disavowed it long before July 1932. The persistence with which Grandi had been forced to defend himself in the Grand Council in previous years against accusations of pacifism, disarmament, and support for the League of Nations, etc., speaks volumes in this regard.

Nor, on closer inspection, should this come as a surprise or seem unjustified. It is not surprising because Fascism had always been intimately and sincerely hostile to pacifism, disarmament, and the League of Nations, viewing them as the negation of what it considered some of its most characteristic ideal values—namely, the instruments through which democracy, socialism (and, from a certain point onward, communism), and the states that used them as a shield to wage their struggle against fascism, had "mutilated" the victory of 1918 and continued to trample upon Italy's "sacrosanct" aspirations.

This view cannot be considered unjustified because, beyond the concrete advantages it was supposed to bring (but did not) on the international stage, Grandi's policy was—from the Fascist perspective—counterproductive on the domestic front.

A policy of peace certainly benefited the regime because it aligned with the aspirations of a large part of the country; similarly, a policy that helped prevent an arms race benefited the country's economy and the regime, which could use the capital—otherwise earmarked for armaments—to address the economic crisis and mitigate its social consequences and, consequently, the political risks. Pacifism, disarmament, and corporatism, however, took on an ideological significance that conflicted with "Fascist ethics" and, more specifically, with the Fascist education that the regime sought to instill in the Italian people and, in particular, in the "new generations of the Littorio."

Not to mention that corporatism, in addition to being ideologically inconceivable to a fascist, discredited Italian foreign policy by branding it with a label of intolerable naivety.

A typical example in this regard is the following passage, taken from an article published in *Popolo d'Italia* in late July by Balbo, one of Grandi's most staunch opponents:

If Voltaire were alive today, he would be hard-pressed to find anywhere on the entire peninsula even a single "Candide" willing to take the universalist and humanitarian initiatives of the League of Nations seriously. Everyone now knows what the Geneva machine is all about.

Any decision that comes out of the League of Nations bears the mark and trademark of the France-England-America bloc. I do not know who compared the Geneva consortium to a corporation, where it

is indeed true that every shareholder has the full right to vote as they wish and to criticize the actions of the Board of Directors, but where, in essence, the opinion and will of those holding the majority stake always prevail. America, indirectly, and France and England, directly and in verifiable numbers, hold two-thirds of the Assembly's delegates. Any effort made by a group distinct from theirs to change this state of affairs will therefore be in vain.

The bloc of dominant powers thus presents a formidable front against third parties, even if internal discussions among them are not without discrepancies and disagreements. Moreover, the Geneva system has reached such a degree of sophistication that it allows for any kind of pretense. Only the naive can take the powerful factions seriously, as they take turns distributing the representatives of the three hegemonic nations among themselves. It is known in advance that these are mere fireworks, and that the compromise formula designed to immediately restore the agreement that seemed to have fallen apart is already waiting in the wings.

This arrangement functioned admirably throughout the six months of the Conference. Not even Italy—though apparently treated with every courtesy and warmly applauded whenever its positions did not conflict with the fundamental concurrent interests of the three major powers—was ultimately able to shift the pre-established positions by even a millimeter. There are, of course, nuances between the method employed by England and that used by France, or the approach favored by America.

With regard to Italy, the reactions of these countries—whether sympathetic or hostile—differ. Inevitably. Perhaps, taken one by one, outside the Geneva setting, in the free arena of European and non-European political competition, their ways of dealing with Italy are polar opposites. But in Geneva, things change.

Here there is a lowest common denominator that inevitably aligns the interests of the three nations, and this lowest common interest takes precedence over any other consideration.

Nor, all the more so, could true fascists accept the idea that Italy could pursue a non-ideological foreign policy (even if it was presented, for domestic consumption, as fascist). From their point of view, in fact, such a policy could have only one result: to place Italy in the wake of the "bloc of the rulers" and to preclude its ability to effectively represent all those countries and forces that, on the contrary, a consistently fascist stance would have rallied around it.

This was all the more true in 1932, when the assertion that fascism was not an export commodity (not coincidentally invoked in October 1930 by Grandi to bolster his non-ideological policy and, most likely, not coincidentally refuted just a few days later by Mussolini) had been—at least for domestic

purposes—set aside, Fascism was increasingly proclaiming its “universality” and its “mission” in Europe and the world, and Mussolini himself was preparing to officially endorse this new slogan.

And this at a time when, given the steady advance of National Socialism in Germany, Fascism found itself for the first time compelled to acknowledge that there was another major political force in Europe—one that was, moreover, on the verge of coming to power—which, rightly or wrongly, proclaimed itself (and was regarded by many in Europe and around the world) as inspired by the same ideals and as the international champion of demands analogous to those of Italy, with interests that were not in conflict with—but rather complementary to—those of Italy.

A force, therefore, that aroused concerns and uncertainties due to its radicalism and, above all, its explicit tendency to champion and exacerbate all the most negative and troubling aspects of Pan-Germanism and German imperialism, could nevertheless also inspire powerful ideological appeal and, above all, entrench the idea that, since Hitler’s rise to power would bring about a new situation in Europe, it was advisable for Italy to wait for this new situation to take shape without taking further steps down a path that—all else aside—appeared to be a dead end and could jeopardize its future relations with the new Germany.

With a few minor and insignificant exceptions, few at the top of the PNF were thinking at the time of an “ideological bloc” with Hitler’s Germany. For most, the rise to power of National Socialism was viewed primarily in terms of the new prospects it would open up for Italian-French relations.

Two articles from the *Corriere Padano* in June 1932 are typical in this regard.

In response to *Le Temps* and Herriot’s call for Italy to choose sides, Balbo’s newspaper wrote:

We can continue and develop the policy imposed on us by circumstances—which is precisely in our true interest—with the certainty of France’s inevitable conversion. And the day will not be long in coming when, contrary to the predictions and assumptions from across the Alps, in the long-awaited or fantasized Franco-Italian talks, it will fall to France itself to take on the role of urging patience and continuing to act as if such a prediction were never to come true… We prefer to remain in the driver’s seat… and preserve our freedom of action in foreign policy… And so we tell you that in our perfectly natural collaboration with the powers of anarchy and upheaval, we find at least freedom, dignity, and all the possibilities of the future. And time works more in our favor than in yours, judging at least by these recent—albeit ineffective—attempts at enticement rather than agreement.

In light of what we have said, it is easy to understand how, as soon as Mussolini ceased to explicitly endorse Grandi’s policy—or, rather, began to distance himself from it so that he could discard it at the opportune moment without having to share responsibility for it— criticism of Grandi within the Fascist leadership became increasingly explicit and widespread, and—albeit in veiled and indirect ways, that is, in the form of official statements ostensibly aimed at criticizing certain attitudes of the major foreign powers—it began to seep into certain regime newspapers as well.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint exactly when this stance began to take shape. By reading between the lines and weighing the words on a poison balance, one can perhaps already detect a hint of criticism of Grandi in the communiqué regarding the Grand Council meeting of October 2, 1931.

Far more explicit, even though it opens with an endorsement of Grandi's work, is the communiqué regarding the meeting of April 8, 1932; in it, in fact, after reiterating the most well-known Fascist positions on foreign policy, an explicit criticism was leveled "against the all-too-frequent convening of international conferences, which arouse recurring hopes among the peoples followed by increasingly severe disappointments and increase areas of friction" and, above all, it explicitly announced that, in light of the continuing stalemate in negotiations among the great powers on all the issues at hand, "the Grand Council reserves the right to examine, at its October session, the question of Fascist Italy's position in the League of Nations."

These two statements, which at first glance might have appeared aimed at supporting Grandi's actions, when examined within a broader context reveal the change of course that Mussolini was preparing.

And now we come to Mussolini. To properly assess the Duce's position and his decision to remove Grandi from Palazzo Chigi, we must first reaffirm a very specific concept. Grandi—as we have seen—undoubtedly had his own conception of foreign policy in general and of Italian foreign policy in particular.

His actions as foreign minister—with the exception of his very last conversations with Herriot and Paganon—had, however, always unfolded within the framework outlined by Mussolini and in full agreement with him. The failure resulting from the Anglo-French agreement at Lausanne was, in this sense, as much his failure as it was Mussolini's; moreover, the two had long since factored in the possibility that their policy might, at some point, lead Italy into a situation of temporary isolation.

Grandi's dismissal, although explained by this failure, did not therefore depend on it. The reason—or rather, the reasons—were different and more complex.

A first reason—the most obvious one—was to make Grandi a sort of scapegoat onto whom to divert the discontent of a large part of the Fascist leadership and, above all, to use him as a negative example to justify Mussolini's decision to revise the policy of international "collaboration" that had been pursued until then.

A second reason—more substantial—stemmed from the conviction Mussolini had by then reached regarding the need to imbue Italian foreign policy with a more distinctly Fascist character (at least formally, since his deep-rooted tactical approach always prevented him from truly anchoring his policies—especially foreign policy—to rigid ideological formulations), one that corresponded not only to the demands coming from the leadership of the National Fascist Party (PNF), to the needs—which were increasingly a priority for him—of educating the younger generations, and to the basic tenets of "universal fascism" espoused by various fascist intellectual and youth groups, but also and above all to his personal ideological conception of fascism, as he was outlining it at that time in connection with a whole series of events (first and foremost the dramatic turn taken by the Great Depression) and political opportunities.

This conception (one of whose most significant manifestations, the Doctrine of Fascism, was published precisely in the weeks surrounding Grandi's dismissal) need not be discussed here, since we have

already addressed it at length in the preceding chapters. Rather, a few words should be devoted—with regard to what we have termed "political opportunities"—to the influence that must have played a role in his conviction of the need to give foreign policy a more distinctly fascist character: on the one hand, the great strides made by National Socialism in Germany from 1930 onward, and, on the other hand, the political ferment and initiatives that, during this same period—whether sincerely or for expedient reasons, which is irrelevant to our discussion—sought to resolve the European crisis through a federalist solution.

Leaving aside for now the issue of Hitler–Mussolini relations during these years and the influence that the National Socialist advance had on the actual conduct of Italian foreign policy, this impact must be viewed—as regards the first aspect—from a very specific perspective: that of Mussolini's need to give Fascism a clearly defined ideological identity, on the one hand to distinguish it from National Socialism (especially regarding racism and anti-Semitism) and thus avoid fueling the hostility it faced in the democratic world, and, on the other hand, to seek to establish, in the long term, in addition to the leadership stemming from his seniority and personal prestige, a sort of ideological leadership over other European fascist and para-fascist movements—that is, to prevent them from falling under the influence of National Socialism and, in the event of national conflicts with Germany, from being drawn away from the Italian sphere of influence due to an overly close identification between fascism and National Socialism.

As for the second aspect—that connected to the ferment and political initiatives of a federalist nature—the discussion pertains not so much to various movements such as E. Borel's Federal Committee for European Cooperation, Y. Le Troquer, and Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropa itself, but essentially to Briand's 1930 proposal, since the other initiatives, from Mussolini's perspective, either never acquired any real political significance or were absorbed by Briand's proposal.

As the vice-chairman of the Finance Committee of the French Chamber of Deputies wrote, the Briand plan immediately encountered "the grim and fateful opposition of Mussolini and his followers," who, in fact, as we have already noted, saw in it an attempt to further extend and, at the same time, mask Paris's hegemony in Europe.

The issue that concerns us here, however, is not so much this immediately political one as the influence that the Briand plan and other pro-European initiatives (which in some cases even sought Mussolini's support or, at the very least, sought not to alienate him) had on the Duce. In fact, it was also to better counter these initiatives that Mussolini felt the need to have fascism adopt a clear ideological position, so as to oppose them with his own conception of Europe and his own ideas about its future structure.

Hence his decision to give new life to (and, at the same time, refine) the anti-European discourse (of the new fascist Europe in contrast to the old democratic Europe) that had already been underway for some time—under the influence of Coudenhove-Kalergi's pan-European ideology—by certain fascist groups and, in particular, by Asvero Gravelli's group.

A discourse that may seem almost irrelevant to us today, but which, in the first half of the 1930s, was of considerable importance to fascism. In fact, it constituted an essential element of the broader discourse of "universal fascism," perhaps the only ideological-cultural discourse that—as Ledeen has clearly shown—for a time succeeded in mobilizing a vast sector of fascist youth and offering them the hope that the "fascist revolution" could resume its course and project itself, as a sort of "permanent revolution," toward ever more advanced and universal goals.

At the same time, it also served as an ideological foundation for attempting to make the anti-European fascist idea the basis upon which to anchor the various European fascist movements, upon which to build a Fascist International—which would thus have been inspired essentially by Italian fascism rather than National Socialism—and upon which—as Gravelli wrote in 1930—"to pave the way for fascist ideas on the continent."

The decisive reason for Grandi's dismissal, however, was another—one that was purely political and of which the previous reason was, at least in part, merely a consequence.

By mid-1932, Mussolini was convinced that the European situation was on the verge of changing radically and would therefore take a course very different from the one it had followed until then. In all the major countries, the political struggle was becoming more radical and polarized in favor of extreme forces on both the right and the left, under the impact of the economic crisis. In Germany in particular, Mussolini took the rise to power of National Socialism for granted, and he was convinced that nothing could prevent it at this point.

Nor, with matters having reached this point, was such an outcome unwelcome to the Duce, even though he made no secret of the fact that it would present significant uncertainties and risks and would inevitably lead to an intra-European conflict in the long run.

This was an outcome that, deep down, he perhaps feared more than anything else, but which, on the one hand, he considered inevitable and unavoidable and, on the other, believed to be far off in the future—much farther than it actually turned out to be, and above all far enough away to allow him both to put himself in the best possible position to face it in the meantime and to maneuver to postpone it as long as possible. He was not averse to it because—as long as the situation in Germany had been open to multiple solutions—the alternative to Hitler had seemed to be the communist one, and thus the National Socialist victory ultimately appeared to be proof of the vitality of authoritarian forces, confirmation of their necessity (and therefore an indirect reaffirmation of fascism's historical function); and because, for better or worse, Germany's "reawakening" revitalized Italy, highlighted its essential contribution to the balance of power within Europe, and thus opened up new horizons for Italy to concretely realize its policy of decisive influence.

And, in fact, there is no doubt that, by removing Grandi, Mussolini essentially made very few changes to the policy pursued up to that point (to the extent that D'Amoja was not wrong to speak of "an old policy given a facelift"), limiting himself mostly to giving it a more "fascist" tone and, for the time being, avoiding tying his hands to either France or Germany, and he also remained faithful to the philosophy of his former foreign minister, even though—having abandoned the ideological prejudice—when faced with the first major difficulties, he would be unable to infuse his actions with that sense of identity which, beyond a certain limit, could not fail to exist between general European interests and particular Italian interests, and which Grandi, at least in theory, had instead sought to keep in mind.

From this perspective, for Mussolini, the foreign policy of Fascist Italy had to be conceived and structured in very precise terms. In the short term—pending the full clarification of the internal situation in Germany—it had to aim to:

1) to distance itself from both France and Germany, adopting a neutral stance toward both, so as to keep open all possibilities for a future policy of balancing between the two, from which to derive, depending on circumstances, every possible advantage;

2) to undermine and, if possible, bring the Anglo-French Treaty of Lausanne into crisis, so as to win back British support for Italy, exploiting for this purpose Britain's absolute reluctance to commit further to the continent and its fear that French intransigence would exacerbate the European situation (We believe that Mussolini's appointment of Grandi as ambassador to London—where, objectively speaking, no other Italian diplomat would have had as many opportunities for such action—can essentially be attributed to the importance Mussolini attached to this aspect of his policy);

3) to exploit the issue of war debts to create difficulties for the French government both domestically and in its relations with the United States;

4) to strengthen as much as possible the agreements with Budapest and Vienna, both to create difficulties for France and the Little Entente, and above all to preemptively establish a barrier against Germany's political and economic advance in that region—an advance that had already been clearly evident for over a year but would certainly intensify (especially regarding Austria) once the National Socialists came to power.

The outcome of this policy was to be an agreement among the four great powers. Italy, England, France, and Germany were to form a sort of European directorate, which—in a sense reviving the Locarno framework but adapting it to the new European reality, that is, giving it a dynamic rather than static character, or, in other words, a moderately revisionist one—would ensure at least a decade of substantial stability and peace for Europe.

A program—as is readily understood—that was ambitious and exceedingly difficult, one that would have secured undeniable advantages—both in terms of prestige and material benefits—for Italy and the Fascist regime, and which was based on exploiting the potentially decisive influence that Italy represented in the new European situation, but which undoubtedly demonstrates a still-vivid desire on Mussolini's part to remain anchored to the post-Versailles European security system and to assign Fascist Italy the role of a responsible great power dedicated to maintaining order, aware of the danger looming over Europe and the need to keep it under control as much as possible.

Thus, one cannot help but agree with R. Moscati when—referring to the Four-Power Pact, which was the attempt, a few months later, to put this program into practice—he writes:

The reasons behind the "Four-Power Pact" should not, in my view, be sought—as has been done—in Mussolini's desire to create a "strategic retreat" following the verbally bellicose policy of the immediately preceding period, nor are his motives "unclear" as they appear to certain historians.

They find a logical explanation if one considers the precise moment when the first draft of the "pact" was drawn up, which echoed many points from the famous Turin speech of October 23, 1932. Already on that occasion, Mussolini had put forward the proposal for a "collaboration among the great Western powers" to begin resolving Europe's political and economic crisis. The difficulties facing the Disarmament Conference, Japan's challenge to the League of Nations, Franco-Italian tensions with their serious repercussions on exports, and, finally, Hitler's rise to power had made the escalating international tension even more evident. And in this situation, the prospect of a "directory" of the four powers—in which, it should be noted, revisionist demands were given due consideration—became

undoubtedly appealing as a solution to European and global problems. Within this directory, Italy, alongside the established powers, would be entrusted with a lofty balancing and moderating role full of "prestige": that of keeping Germany in check while accommodating some of its demands, while Great Britain, for its part, would have smoothed over French hardlines, helping to improve its relations with Italy, which had reached a breaking point. Not that the pact was intended to have a clearly anti-French or anti-German meaning, but it is certain—as Mussolini emphasized with extreme clarity, and, following his directives, the entire unofficial Fascist press—that the England-Italy partnership was assigned a "special role" vis-à-vis the France-Germany partnership.

In other words, according to Mussolini's vision, in a four-party "directory"—an alternative to, or at least a corrective of, the League of Nations—Italy, as a balancing power, would have been expected to rein in Germany in the Danube-Balkan region, while at the same time acting as Germany's representative to mediate its interests in the realm of international legal equality.

It was up to England to initiate a constructive dialogue with France regarding the unresolved issues with Italy.

It was precisely on this point—that of Italian colonial compensation—that the short-term perspective of Mussolini's political vision converged with what we might consider its medium-term outlook, and the Duce's strategy, in turn, aligned with what had become the obsessive preoccupation of a large part of the "career" faction.

Italian colonial compensation, both legally and morally, always found its justification in the "outstanding" provisions of the London Pact. Realistically, however, Mussolini realized that achieving them would have been far less difficult if, instead of coming directly at the expense of the French colonial empire and prestige, it had been carried out at someone else's expense—especially if, at the opportune moment, it had been possible to give the entire operation a "justification" that—endorsed by the other great powers—would allow it to be presented to the world in the least unfavorable terms.

And objectively, this could only take place in Ethiopia—both because only there would the interests of no European country be directly harmed, and because there were prior Anglo-French-Italian agreements that had recognized Italy's special interests in Ethiopia and that would have allowed London and Paris to continue asserting their own interests even in a new context, without this taking on a meaning different from what it had had up to that point, both because—as we have seen—there were significant indications that if France were ultimately to yield to Italian demands, it was precisely toward Ethiopia that Paris was increasingly and insistently considering directing them, and—finally—because the internal situation in Ethiopia could be exploited to find sufficiently convincing justifications for presenting to international public opinion the need for a partial or total change in its territorial and political status.

If we add to all this the fact that Mussolini was certainly not—partly due to his cultural background, partly due to his conviction that Italy needed above all "settler colonies" where hundreds of thousands of Italians could be settled, partly to avoid taking an action that, for better or worse, would have taken on an anti-German tone, and partly because it had always been championed by political groups and circles, economic and bureaucratic circles—who were more nationalists than genuinely fascists—he

was a staunch advocate of the Chad-Cameroon expansionist line, whereas Ethiopia was perceived not only by him as a far more “Italian” cause but had been present in the Italian national consciousness since the days of Dogali and Adwa as a “stain” to be washed away. It is therefore understandable why, a commitment in those lands, on the one hand, would have been psychologically easier for the country to accept and, on the other hand, would have constituted a twofold success for Fascism: it would have led to the establishment of a true Italian colonial empire and would have demonstrated that Fascist Italy had succeeded where previous liberal governments had failed; If one bears all this in mind, it is easy to understand why, precisely in 1932—parallel to the maturing of the July turning point and the launch of the first phase of his new foreign policy—Mussolini turned decisively toward Ethiopia and definitively made it the focal point for the second phase of that policy, the guiding star toward which to strive in all circumstances and upon which to orient all Italian policy.

The best evidence of Mussolini’s interest in Ethiopia is provided by De Bono’s diary and, more generally, by the renewed attention with which Ethiopian affairs were followed from Rome beginning in 1932.

After the 1928 treaty, Italian-Ethiopian relations had developed along the lines of essentially good neighborly relations, which did not indicate any particular ulterior motive on Italy’s part. Toward the beginning of 1930, the internal situation in Ethiopia had shown some signs of deterioration, in particular an endemic state of insurrection against the central government in various peripheral regions.

Colonial Minister De Bono had sought to draw Grandi’s attention to this new situation. Grandi, however, had argued for the need to avoid any worsening of relations between Rome and Addis Ababa and had limited himself to authorizing the continuation of the so-called “peripheral policy” (that is, relations with elements hostile to the Negus in the regions bordering Eritrea and Somalia) and to try to persuade Mussolini of the advisability of granting Ethiopia a loan of twenty million lire (which the Italian financial market was unable to provide and which the Ministry of Finance ruled out assuming) to prevent France from granting it and thereby further strengthening relations between Paris and Addis Ababa.

Mussolini, however, had shown little interest in the proposal. Nor had things changed much in the following year. The first signs of the Duce’s genuine interest in Ethiopia date back to 1932, that is, after Laval’s overtures and when Mussolini began to develop the idea of his new policy. The first tangible sign was the dispatch of De Bono to Eritrea on an inspection mission to assess the situation.

Upon his return, on March 22, the Quadrumvir presented a report to Mussolini in which, while hinting at his inclination toward armed intervention that would have resolved the situation for years to come, he ultimately advocated for a political rather than a military course of action:

A large-scale armed intervention on our part that secured a military victory would stabilize our situation for years to come. But it is pointless to consider this now. It would require extensive preparations and hundreds of millions in expenditures, which would be better spent elsewhere.

Political action, therefore, remains the option. The “morphine strategy” has had little success; the peripheral policy of agreements with the Chiefs has failed, and I no longer consider it feasible. Better to

seek an agreement with France and England—that is, to give practical and positive substance to the 1925 Tripartite Agreement.

If we do not have a hostile France fanning the flames, the Emperor will eventually feel isolated, and nationalist machinations will not be able to have deleterious consequences. Furthermore, by depriving Sellassie of European support, he will lose standing in the eyes of the Ras—whom he has managed to subjugate—and they will thus regain their former power, engaging in disruptive activities that will work to our advantage… I believe a decision must be made, and soon, so as not to lose ground.

At the time, Mussolini seemed to disregard the report, merely thanking De Bono and remarking noncommittally:

Your political and military considerations deserve the utmost attention. I am pleased to note that, on the whole, Eritrea is also making progress.

During the first half of the year, the only other development that might, perhaps, indicate a renewed interest in Ethiopia was the instructions that Grandi issued to the governor of Eritrea on June 4, urging him to closely monitor the situation in Ethiopia and to "maintain those contacts with peripheral elements that are essential for keeping the Royal Government fully informed, and to take whatever action is deemed most appropriate, depending on how events unfold."

After July, having settled into his new policy, Mussolini hastened to task De Bono with preparing a plan for possible action in Ethiopia. By December, the plan was ready, and De Bono presented it to the Duce. Under the date of December 15, 1932, he noted in his diary:

I presented him with the plan for a possible operation in Abyssinia. He liked it. I would command it, if necessary… It is supposed to take place in '35, but I fear he has not properly calculated the costs and consequences.

These few words by De Bono provide proof that Mussolini, as he was preparing to launch the Four-Power Pact, already had it quite clear that the next move had to be in Ethiopia: peace in Europe was to

yield an empire for Italy.

Again, from these same few words, it would seem that De Bono's own remark in his book four years later—regarding the preparations and the first phase of the war in Ethiopia—that he had at the time been in favor of "daring in a Fascist manner," that is, taking the initiative as early as '32, was nothing more than a bit of bragging.

If, however, this were true and it turned out that De Bono, when presenting his plan to Mussolini, did indeed advocate for immediate intervention, the postponement of this until 1935 would be the best demonstration of what we have asserted—namely, that the Four-Power Pact and the empire were inseparably linked for Mussolini, and that the expansion of the colonies of Eritrea and Somalia (for this was what was at stake for a long time, even for the Duce, and not a complete occupation of Ethiopia) was not conceived by him as an operation against everything and everyone, as it ultimately became, but rather as an operation that was intended to benefit Italy and Fascism; yet—as paradoxical as it may seem to us today—it was to be carried out within a substantially peaceful framework, at least as far as the major European powers were concerned.

In fact, all the documentation at our disposal proves that Mussolini only began to make up his mind to take action in Ethiopia in February 1934, after both the Four-Power Pact and the General Disarmament Conference had failed and Germany had withdrawn from the League of Nations—that is, when he became convinced that the European situation was now sliding down the slippery slope toward catastrophe, and therefore believed that Italy should take advantage of the opportunities still available to fulfill its "imperial destiny" so that it could then devote itself entirely to European problems, before their deterioration precluded any possibility of initiative or negotiation.

A reconstruction of the diplomatic events through which Mussolini's attempt to implement the first phase of his "new" foreign policy unfolded—at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, in bilateral relations with the other great powers and with the governments of the Danube-Balkan countries, and in the various forums where, between the second half of 1932 and the end of 1934, European policymakers tried in vain to address the crisis that was by then threatening the old continent) obviously falls outside the scope of this work. Moreover, these events are, on the whole, sufficiently well-known to allow us to refer to them only briefly.

What is more important here is to focus instead on some underlying causes and key moments of these events, which are essential for understanding Mussolini's actions—in terms of his motivations, the influences shaping him, their concrete historical significance, as well as their evolution and subsequent outcomes.

The first issue that must be clearly elucidated is that of the Mussolini-Hitler relationship and, in particular, the Duce's attitude toward the rise to power of National Socialism in Germany. This, in fact, is to a very large extent the key to understanding Mussolini's foreign policy both during this period and in the period that followed.

In a previous volume, we have already briefly touched upon the very earliest relations between Fascism and National Socialism. Expanding on this somewhat, it can be said that while there were undoubtedly relations dating back to 1922, it is equally certain that until 1930 they had no significant impact on Fascist foreign policy.

Based on the available documentation, it seems certain that the initiative was taken by Hitler, who,

shortly before the March on Rome, sent one of his trusted men, Kurt G. W. Ludecke, to Italy to establish contact with Mussolini.

A few months later, Ludecke himself was tasked with maintaining contact with certain Fascist political and journalistic circles, succeeding in having a number of articles and letters published that expressed a certain sympathy toward Hitler.

Overall, however, these were sporadic and politically insignificant contacts; nor were there any lack of statements from the Fascist side opposing National Socialism, which was considered a "parody" of Fascism. On the occasion of the failed Munich Putsch of November 9, 1923, and even afterward, there was repeated talk of economic aid from the Fascists to Hitler; however, no concrete evidence has ever been found, and there are many reasons to rule this out.

Aside from other contingent and opportunistic reasons, what made actual relations between the two movements extremely difficult was the fact that National Socialism, in its fervently pan-Germanist vision of Germany's future, laid claim to South Tyrol; and although after the March on Rome Ludecke had convinced Hitler to renounce this part of his program in order to win Mussolini's friendship, and had publicly expressed this view in the Fascist press, no one actually believed in the sincerity of this renunciation—all the more so because there was ample evidence to regard it as merely tactical and, in any case, not shared by the vast majority of National Socialists.

The failed Munich Putsch and Hitler's subsequent conviction had then discredited National Socialism even in the eyes of the few who, in the preceding months, had given some credence to Ludecke's statements and had shown interest in the Hitler movement's struggle against communism and the Weimar Republic.

For several years, relations had therefore become extremely strained (as, indeed, after General Capello's mission and the 1926 controversies over South Tyrol; this was generally the case with the German right-wing as well), and one might even speak of a complete break had they not continued in Italy—especially at the level of certain second-tier political figures and some Fascist intellectuals—with some of Hitler's friends and collaborators (such as Göring) who had taken refuge in Italy to escape arrest.

To find substantial evidence of a resumption of these ties, one must wait practically until 1927, when Hitler (who had been released from prison at the end of 1924) began seeking with increasing insistence to establish contacts with Italian diplomats in Germany.

According to Hitler's political vision, Germany—just as it had no historical grounds for conflict with England (a maritime rather than a continental power)—had none with Italy (a Mediterranean power, whereas Germany was a continental power oriented toward the northeast), while both shared a common enemy: France.

The South Tyrol issue was not to stand in the way of their collaboration: the Germans in that region were not worth Italy's enmity, and he was prepared to set them aside in order to secure that friendship. This was all the more true given that Italy meant Fascism and Mussolini.

Hitler did not deny that there were differences between Fascism and National Socialism. In particular, he reproached Fascism for not yet having realized the Jewish danger, for the "disagreement" existing "between the views of the best [Italian] national policy and the will of stock-market Judaism," and for

the “profound concordance” that had emerged in France between the views “of the Jews of the stock market” and those of “national policy with a chauvinistic mentality”.

Similarly, Hitler did not consider his movement an offshoot of fascism. As he stated many years later, however, he was convinced that the rise of National Socialism had been greatly facilitated by the existence of fascism:

Our program was drawn up in 1919, and at that time I knew nothing about him [Mussolini]. Our doctrine rests on its own foundations; the thought of every individual is a resultant. Let it not be said, therefore, that Italian events had no influence on us. The Brownshirts would probably never have existed without the Blackshirts. The March on Rome in 1922 was a decisive turning point in history. The mere fact that such a thing could be attempted and successfully carried out gave us strength. A few weeks after the March on Rome, I was received by Minister Schweyer. That certainly would not have happened without that event.

If Marxism had gained the upper hand over Mussolini, I don’t know if the rest of us would have managed to stay afloat. At that time, National Socialism was a very fragile plant.

The essential point for him, however, was Mussolini’s personality—a personality that not only exerted an enormous fascination on him, to the point that for years he would regard the Duce as his mentor and attribute his own failures to the weakness (in the racial sense) of the raw material with which he had to work and to the constraints imposed by the monarchy, but which also constituted for him a guarantee for the future: “a great personality” like Mussolini—so aware of his country’s needs and the destiny of his homeland, and so deeply identified with them—could not fail to understand the historical significance of the friendship and alliance between the National Socialist and Fascist “revolutions.”

And so, just as he was prepared to sacrifice the Germans of South Tyrol on the altar of this friendship and alliance, so too would Mussolini sooner or later have understood the necessity of not obstructing Austria’s union with Germany—both because it was a historical necessity and because the party truly interested in preventing the Anschluss was not Italy—Germany’s natural ally—but France, which, in doing so, did indeed want to prevent Germany from growing stronger, but at the same time was also convinced “that it could one day gain a member for the Franco-European alliance within the Austrian state,” thereby making it the linchpin of its system of European hegemony, the link connecting it to the countries of the Little Entente.

Hitler expressed these convictions in May and December 1927 to the Italian press attaché in Berlin. Even more important, however, is the fact that he set them forth both in *Mein Kampf* (which he had begun drafting in prison and which was published in 1925–26), in the so-called *Secret Book* (written in 1928 and remaining unpublished until after World War II), and in a pamphlet titled *Die sudtiroler Frage und das deutsche Bundnisproblem* (from 1926), as well as in a series of public speeches—which, as far as South Tyrol was concerned, did not even find unanimous support among all National

Socialists and which drew fierce attacks from broad sectors of the right, especially from the most ardent Pan-Germanists linked to the South Tyrolean irredentist movement.

In 1928, Hitler also began, both directly and through intermediaries, to press the Italian embassy in Berlin to secure a meeting with Mussolini in Rome. Mussolini's response to these overtures, however, was quite cautious. Officially, he had it replied that he was willing to receive Hitler. The meeting, however, was postponed "to a date to be determined," "in any case after the German elections."

"A meeting before then," he telegraphed to the consul general in Munich, "would benefit no one but Hitler's opponents." In practice, with this "diplomatic" formula, Mussolini did not reject the overture, but postponed it indefinitely, waiting for the domestic situation in Germany to become clearer so that he could form a more precise idea of the real influence National Socialism held there (on May 20, in the elections, Hitler received 809,000 votes out of 29.5 million—too few to be considered a real force).

Thus, for the time being, Hitler had to settle for a non-binding secret meeting in Bavaria with Senator Ettore Tolomei, a staunch advocate of the policy of Italianizing South Tyrol.

During the meeting, which took place in August 1928, Hitler reaffirmed his lack of interest in South Tyrol and his conviction that Italy and Germany should reach an agreement (though he hinted that he was convinced the Anschluss would inevitably come to pass); however, he received no commitment to assistance in return. Mussolini's caution is confirmed by the attitude of the Fascist press at the time.

Until 1927, it can be said that the press was still reeling from the failure of the Munich Putsch and showed no real sympathy for National Socialism. The results of the 1928 elections softened but did not fundamentally alter this attitude. Few newspapers were inclined to follow the political developments of Hitler's party with greater attention.

As for the election results it achieved, they were generally viewed with detachment and a lack of enthusiasm. If, when discussing the German situation, any particular aspect was emphasized, it was above all its instability and unsustainability, from which—it was said—Germany could probably emerge only through a coup d'état. Scanning the Fascist press, however, one gets the impression that, in the event of a right-wing coup d'état, it had in mind more the Stahlhelm—the powerful organization of former combatants (which, not coincidentally, *Critica fascista* referred to as "the so-called German Fascists")—or the German Nationalists than the National Socialists.

Nor did things change much during 1929 and the first half of 1930. During this period, there were still rumors on the German side of an impending visit by Hitler to Rome. These rumors, however, were not taken up by the Italian side, and likewise, the plan for a "study" trip to Italy by a group of National Socialist deputies came to nothing.

Rather than venturing into overly formal contacts, Rome preferred to continue maintaining relations on a less demanding and more indirect basis (through the consul in Munich and, more often, through even less compromising intermediaries); especially since, precisely during this period, rumors of Italian funding for the NSDAP had begun to circulate with some persistence, and the German public was following with keen interest the proceedings of a lawsuit filed by Hitler against two newspapers that had reported these accusations in connection with the events of 1923, attributing Hitler's "conciliatory" stance on the South Tyrol issue to the alleged Italian funding.

Even taking these circumstances into account—and the caution they should have inspired—it is

nonetheless significant that contacts with the Stahlhelm intensified precisely during this period. This suggests that, at that time, there was greater sympathy and trust in Rome toward this movement than toward Hitler's, even though the Stahlhelm—unlike Hitler's movement—had never officially taken a stance on the South Tyrol issue and, on more than one occasion, its members had participated in anti-Italian irredentist demonstrations.

In conclusion, based on the available documentation (though we do not believe that new evidence could substantially alter the picture), it seems fair to say that, despite Hitler's repeated pro-Italian and pro-fascist statements regarding South Tyrol and despite his overtures for a meeting with Mussolini, interest in National Socialism was quite limited in the 1920s, both at Palazzo Chigi and at the top of the PNF (it is telling that while a few party representatives were sent to the Nuremberg rallies in the later years, they were always figures of little importance, even obscure ones), as well as on Mussolini's part, and that the relations maintained with some of its leaders never went beyond the nature and level of those with other representatives of European far-right and pro-fascist parties and movements (and often remained below that level) and were motivated solely by the logic of "looking inward" German political affairs, to try to counter in some way the anti-fascist propaganda of the democratic and left-wing parties, and to secure a certain influence in circles where it was considered expedient to have friends—both to use them to create difficulties for the German government (especially the hated Stresemann) and with a view to the right's participation in power.

A shift in this attitude did not occur until 1930.

The German general election of September 14, 1930, marked an important moment in the history of relations between Fascism and National Socialism. It was foreseeable that the election would result in an increase in votes for the right-wing parties and, consequently, for the National Socialists as well. No one, however, had imagined that Hitler would jump from 809,000 votes to 6,401,000 and that the economic crisis would make his party the second-largest in Germany.

A letter from Orsini, the ambassador in Berlin, to Grandi dated July 28 indicates that, two months before the election, Hitler expected to increase his number of seats from twelve to fifty (in reality, he won 107); nor did the final weeks of the election campaign give him a sense of the success he was about to achieve, since on September 16 he acknowledged to the consul in Munich, Capasso Torre, that it had exceeded even his own expectations.

Particularly significant, as far as fascism is concerned, are the two commentaries on the German elections published on September 8 and 19 in the PNF's *Foglio d'ordini*.

The first reads:

The 1930 elections are not yet destined to tip the scales, given that the polls are yielding results of such magnitude. For this reason, we await the results with calm indifference. Electoral battles barely stimulate our curiosity. The Germany of 1930 interests us only insofar as it precedes—not merely chronologically—the Germany of tomorrow.

The second passage reveals the full extent of the embarrassment caused by Hitler's unexpected and resounding success. While, on the one hand, they sought to maintain that the elections—having not been "decisive"—had not substantially altered the German situation, on the other hand they acknowledged that "from an 'indicative' standpoint, their significance is extraordinary." And, having acknowledged Hitler's triumph, it was immediately emphasized that the Communists, too, had gained ground—in order to draw at least the conclusion that the elections had confirmed the Fascist political vision: in the 20th century, the moderate forces of liberalism, democracy, and socialism had nothing more to offer; the conflict was now between the far right and the far left, between Fascism and Bolshevism.

One need only skim through the fascist press in the days immediately following the elections to understand how decisive the National Socialist success was in prompting the fascists to reconsider the entire German question from a new perspective, and how untrue was the Olympian calm that the fascist leadership sought to display in the face of the new situation that had arisen in Germany.

Particularly significant are the comments in the most authoritative journals. That of the Botta-aligned *Critica fascista*, for example, reveals a mood that is more fearful than triumphant: in practice, rather than further advances by Hitler and a decisive rupture in the German political balance, it called for—in line with Mussolini's revisionism—a new policy by the great powers toward Germany that, having satisfied German "national dignity," would allow for the development of the "moderate possibilities" still alive in German society.

The commentary in *Gerarchia* is even more interesting to us, as it reveals at least one of the directions along which Mussolini's policy toward the German right in general—and the National Socialists in particular—would move for some time.

In general, the article acknowledged that the elections had been a triumph for Hitler and made no secret of a certain satisfaction with this fact:

it satisfies us as Fascists to see that another great European country is rebelling, with millions of votes, against the crumbling myth of democracy, and it benefits us as Italians to enjoy the greater freedom of international action that has come to Italy with the end of that unnatural alliance between France and Germany—conceived by Briand and Stresemann and relentlessly nurtured with specifically anti-Italian objectives by French and German democratic Freemasonry—until the day of truth, when Hitler brought it to justice. The Fascist idea is gaining ground throughout the world.

If we move from this general assessment to examining the article in all its assertions, however, two of them appear to contradict this complacency.

One quite clearly so—the one drawing attention to the Anschluss and "the aims of the National Socialist Party, and the tendencies of the German people in this regard." The other, less explicitly, was dropped almost by chance, but was no less significant for that: the one in which "the Steel Helmets"

were described as “victorious,” as if to say or imply that Hitler’s success was essentially due not only to the young people voting for the first time but also to the Stahlhelm—that is, to a force largely independent of National Socialism that had cast its votes for him during the election.

Nor, to fully appreciate the significance of this comment in *Gerarchia*, can one overlook the fact that in the following November issue, the same magazine published—certainly not by chance—an article by W. von der Schulenburg titled “Has the Fascist Idea Influenced the Outcome of the Latest German General Election?”, in which the differences between fascism and National Socialism were emphasized far more than the similarities; it asserted that the latter had a program that was too rigid, condemned its anti-Semitism, and, between the lines, even went so far as to insinuate that Hitler was a sort of “demagogue.”

Nor was the interest in the German situation and in National Socialism a temporary phenomenon linked to the elections and their sensational outcome.

On the contrary, by September 1930 it had become a constant theme in much of the Italian press, particularly among the most committed fascist publications. This gave rise to a considerable number of writings that reveal a contradictory and uncertain state of mind—one that was highly symptomatic. It is evident that, during this period, the fascists viewed National Socialism with satisfaction and hope, but at the same time with uncertainty and even fear.

With satisfaction, because the emergence of another major movement similar in many respects to Fascism could not but be viewed positively by the Fascists—as confirmation, that is, of the universal validity of their condemnation of liberalism, democracy, and socialism, and of their struggle against Bolshevism.

With hope, because the crisis of the Weimar Republic would undoubtedly give Fascist foreign policy and revisionism an opportunity for action and success that would otherwise have been unthinkable.

But, at the same time, with uncertainty and even fear, both because at the root of National Socialism, Pan-Germanism, revanchism, and the will to power were so strong and evident that it was difficult to rule out that, once in power, it would not resume and exacerbate the imperial policy of the Wilhelmine Reich, even toward Italy and the countries that Italy considered part of its own sphere of influence and political-economic penetration (Austria first and foremost, and subsequently Hungary); and because a “fascist” victory in Germany would inevitably, in addition to the advantages, bring disadvantages to Fascist Italy— which, though difficult to quantify, would certainly have been significant—it would, for example, likely have diminished the sympathy Italy enjoyed in many conservative European and American circles, strengthened French influence over a number of countries that would have felt threatened by Germany, and made the diplomatic interplay between Paris and Berlin more complex.

Hence the series of contradictions and uncertainties that, as mentioned, characterized the attitude of the Fascist press from the second half of 1930 through 1932 toward German events and National Socialism in particular.

This attitude can—in broad terms—be summarized as follows:

a) National Socialism was the product of the misguided policies of the major victorious powers—and of France in particular—toward Germany;

b) it was in line with the spirit of the new era and with fascism, but it was too narrowly German, too dogmatic, and not political enough; in short, it lacked the universal appeal of true fascism—that is, Italian fascism—which derived from the capacity for synthesis and balance typical of a people whose ancient civilization was rooted in Roman heritage;

c) Rather than a National Socialist victory in its own right, a victory for the right-wing front as a whole was therefore desirable in Germany: the German Nationalists and the Stahlhelm would, in fact, have moderated Hitler, induced him to adopt a more realistic approach, and, through their presence, would have given rise to a great national force capable of establishing truly fascist policies and institutions.

From this perspective, within the vast body of Fascist literature on National Socialism from 1931–32, the position taken by *Antieuropa* holds particular significance—given Gravelli's ties to Mussolini and his efforts during this period to lay the foundations for the Fascist International— which, among other things, took the initiative to conduct an investigation into National Socialism that garnered widespread attention in both Italy and Germany and was also covered by numerous newspapers in other countries.

Opening with a "letter" to Gravelli from Anton Hilckmann, a journalist for the *Allgemeine Rundschau*, which was highly critical of National Socialism (accused of being fascist only in form but not in ideological substance), the investigation unfolded primarily through a series of contributions by German politicians and intellectuals from the center and the right—both National Socialists and non-National Socialists, Catholics and Protestants.

The conclusions were drawn by Hilckmann himself, who firmly reiterated his initial position and stated in no uncertain terms that "the points of contact between Italian Fascism and Hitlerism are merely superficial" and that there were in fact no "bridges" between the two parties.

We have dwelled at length on the reactions of the Fascist press because they are indicative of the significant impact that the German elections of 1930 had on Fascism and of the problems they posed for it, and because, based on them, it is possible to understand some of the underlying reasons that led the vote of September 14 to have a decisive influence on relations between Fascism and National Socialism and, in the long run, on Italian foreign policy as a whole. For while these relations had, until then, been a virtually irrelevant aspect of Mussolini's policy—almost a matter of routine, in their own way—from this point forward they became an increasingly important element of it.

Hitler's great electoral victory—and above all his continued gains in the subsequent elections over the next two years—could not fail to present Mussolini with the problem of both how to try to use them to his own advantage and how to prevent Italy and Fascism from bearing the brunt of the consequences, given the nature of National Socialism.

At that time, Mussolini certainly did not hold Hitler in the same personal regard that Hitler held for him, nor was he in any way captivated by his personality. To him, the "Führer" was a man who was part laughable and part fanatical, who had written a book, *Mein Kampf*, that was "unreadable," who had made a complete fool of himself in 1923, who surrounded himself with men who were largely fanatical and often immoral (given Mussolini's virile mindset, the homosexuality of various National Socialist leaders was inconceivable) and, above all, a man of little political stature, lacking the flexibility and subtlety so necessary for a true politician, who found himself riding high more because of the "logic of history" than because of his own ability.

An episode recounted by Ludwig is quite significant. One day in 1932, while Ludwig was interviewing him for the *Colloqui*, Mussolini suddenly asked him:

“What do you think of Hitler?” I lowered my right hand to indicate the height of a dwarf and said, “Hitler? Like this!” He nodded, evidently satisfied, but didn’t say much; he looked at me with a penetrating gaze and added, “But… he has six million votes.”

Furthermore, Mussolini did not share Hitler’s racism at all—he fully grasped its deeply anti-Latin nature—and, though certainly not a friend of the Semites, he did not share Hitler’s extreme anti-Semitism either, which, above all, he considered politically counterproductive. The only truly positive aspect of Hitler’s personality, in the Duce’s view, must have been the great political and personal admiration Hitler harbored for him—an admiration that drove Hitler not only to declare himself more and more often in favor of a policy of collaboration with Italy (even though this caused him no small amount of difficulty, even among his own party comrades), but also to consider himself Mussolini’s protégé and to show himself eager to receive advice and suggestions from him.

This explains how Mussolini, caught between the need to come to terms with the new situation taking shape in Germany and, therefore, to find a modus vivendi with National Socialism, and the awareness of the risks that German revanchism’s excessive dynamism and intransigence—along with the fanaticism with which Hitler, once in power, would seek to realize his pan-German and expansionist aspirations—might pose to his policies and to Italy itself—did not rule out exploring other avenues from the outset and, in any case, did not wish to tie his hands too tightly to Hitler’s—he effectively ended up deluding himself that, in the final analysis, what he could not achieve through his political skill, he could achieve through his personality, his prestige, and the influence these would grant him over the “Führer.”

It is from this perspective that one must view an entire aspect—and the most significant one—of the relations between Fascism and National Socialism, as they developed after September 1930.

After the elections of September 14, these relations immediately began to intensify and gradually became increasingly systematic and close, both at the level of the two parties, through trusted aides of the two leaders, and through contacts maintained more or less discreetly by Italian diplomatic missions in Germany—primarily the embassy in Berlin and the consulate in Munich.

Regarding the latter, a clarification is in order. Obviously, the instructions concerning them were issued by Rome; however, the documentation we have consulted does not indicate that the “career diplomats” expressed excessive resistance or concern regarding these contacts (except for the desire that they not be leaked and not disrupt official relations with the German government); nor—more importantly—do they almost ever reveal attitudes that were truly hostile to National Socialism or substantially different from those more properly associated with Fascism; Overall, one gets the impression that during this period, Mussolini’s policy toward Germany was largely shared by the “career” officials, at least as far as their representatives on the ground were concerned.

At the public or semi-public level, the new situation was marked above all by the proliferation, between the end of 1930 and the end of 1932, of ties between the two parties, both through the creation of permanent organizations (for example, the formation of National Socialist groups among Germans residing in Italy was permitted, and the establishment in Rome of an NSDAP political office tasked with maintaining ties with the PNF was authorized) and, especially, by an intensification of trips to Italy by Hitlerite figures and, consequently, of opportunities for direct contact (it was during two of these trips, in 1931 and 1932, that Göring had the opportunity to be received by Mussolini).

By contrast, there were far fewer instances of Fascist leaders traveling to Germany and establishing contacts with the National Socialist leadership; it is significant in this regard that, until 1933, only third-tier Fascist leaders attended the annual Nuremberg rallies (at the 1933 rally, however, a delegation including Bottai and Marpicati—one of the PNF's deputy secretaries—took part).

Regarding these contacts, however, it should be noted that at the same time, relations with other right-wing political groups in Germany—and in particular with the Stahlhelm—also developed significantly (in fact, relations with the Stahlhelm took on a more authoritative and official character than those with the NSDAP, to the point that at the end of 1930 a delegation from the Stahlhelm was even received by Mussolini).

According to Hoepke, even during this period Mussolini is said to have sympathized more with the political position of the Stahlhelm than with that of National Socialism.

Personally, we agree with this assessment, which, moreover, is supported by numerous pieces of evidence. Rome had already begun to look closely at the Stahlhelm even before September 1930.

A report from Ambassador Orsini to Grandi dated April 28, 1930, informs us that by that date contacts had already been made with some representatives of this organization and that it was preparing to amend its program precisely in light of the opportunity for closer ties with Italy:

The new program will clearly reflect a tendency toward rapprochement with Italy. The question of South Tyrol will be definitively set aside—and as far as economic policy is concerned, the organization will declare itself in favor of trade agreements with Italy, so as to promote the development of relations between the two countries—Italy and Germany. The "Steel Helmets," who aim to establish a national front, are also in favor of agreements with other countries, including England—with the exception of France. The "Steel Helmets" aim to seize power through legal means as long as Hindenburg remains head of the Republic. However, should he pass away, they believe that violent action on their part to seize control of the government and the presidency would become inevitable. In this case, they hope to have the Reichswehr on their side and sympathize with Italy, so as to receive aid from it in the form of weapons and ammunition. Despite the disagreements and controversies in the newspapers, a virtual, tacit agreement exists between the "Steel Helmets," the Hitlerites, and the German National Party.

Given these favorable conditions and this situation, as early as July, G. Renzetti had foreseen the imminent formation of a national front comprising German Nationalists, National Socialists, and the

Stahlhelm, and had advised supporting it and focusing efforts on it.

If we add to these precedents:

a) that the Stahlhelm gave the impression of having a very solid organization and broad support throughout the country;

b) that, as Hitler himself explicitly admitted, not only the police but also the Reichswehr were at that time opposed to National Socialism;

c) that the NSDAP was perpetually plagued by internal crises and defections—including those of leading figures—which cast doubt on its stability as a party and sometimes made it seem as though it were groping in the dark;

d) that, above all, in Rome—within the party as well as in government and diplomatic circles—National Socialism was viewed with suspicion and fear, as something that could undoubtedly be very useful but also dangerous and counterproductive; It is hardly surprising that, immediately following the forceful assertion that "nothing is more erroneous than the identification between National Socialism and Fascism, between Mussolini's theses and those of Hitler," and after an explanation of the political and social differences between the two, Mussolini, after September 14, became influenced by those—first and foremost Renzetti—who conceived the idea of banking, discreetly but essentially, on the Stahlhelm card, in an attempt to make it the linchpin of a grand right-wing coalition capable of serving as a reliable point of reference for all nationalist forces and thus further broadening popular support for them; in short, a group that could present itself as a genuine alternative to power, but which would also serve to temper some of the most subversive and intransigent aspects of National Socialism, making it more malleable and "political"; all without, however, antagonizing Hitler, but rather by posing as his friends and advisors, so as to keep him as a trump card, always stay abreast of his intentions, and influence his policies as much as possible, both directly and through the German Nationalists and, above all, the Stahlhelm.

In addition to being the architect of this strategy, the man who—at Mussolini's behest—took on the task of implementing this policy was Major Giuseppe Renzetti.

Already an official with the Italian Commission for Lower Silesia, he had been living in Germany for years (where Mussolini had met him in 1922) and was very well connected in many right-wing political circles, where he also had numerous personal friends. Officially, he was the president of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Berlin; in reality, he had long been the Duce's right-hand man in Germany and a sort of personal "parallel ambassador" to the German right-wing.

His correspondence therefore constitutes a unique source for attempting to reconstruct this policy and to understand its subsequent adjustments to developments in the German situation, as the Stahlhelm and National Front cards proved increasingly weak and, conversely, Hitler's influence grew ever more decisive.

They show beyond a shadow of a doubt that from the end of 1930 onward, Renzetti maintained close ties with Hitler, Göring, and the leading National Socialist figures—and, drawing on the esteem in which he was held among them and his status as Mussolini's trusted confidant—he sought by every means to influence their policies in the direction desired by Rome; that is, on the one hand, by advocating an agreement among all right-wing factions, and on the other hand, by discouraging any

tendency toward agreements—even local ones—with centrist forces or with the government (whether Brüning or Papen).

Among other things, it was he who organized Göring's first meeting with Mussolini, on the occasion of which direct personal contacts between the Duce and the National Socialist leadership began, as did the correspondence between Mussolini and Hitler.

In fact, it was after this meeting that Hitler, on June 8, 1931, wrote his first letter to the Duce to thank him for sending, via Göring, a photograph of himself with a dedication. An episode that may seem seemingly irrelevant, but is in reality quite significant—both for the tone of the letter and for assessing once again the shift that the National Socialist electoral success of the previous September had brought about in Mussolini's attitude toward Hitler: a few years earlier, in 1926–27, Hitler had requested through the embassy in Berlin the "honor" of receiving a signed photograph of the Duce, a request that had, however, been denied at the time.

Sending him his own photograph in return, Hitler wrote:

Your Excellency,

Your Excellency was kind enough to send me, through Captain Göring, a photograph of yourself with a dedication. I consider this a great honor for me.

The sympathy that Your Excellency expresses in the dedication for the National Socialist movement is shared by me; for years, I have felt a particularly strong affinity for Fascism and for Your Excellency.

The spiritual ties that exist between the fundamental tenets and principles of Fascism and those of the movement I lead give me great hope that, following the victory of National Socialism in Germany—a victory in which I have unwavering faith—it will be possible to establish the same ties between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany for the good of these two great nations.

I would like to express my gratitude along with my respectful best wishes to Your Excellency personally and to Fascist Italy, which Your Excellency so brilliantly leads.

At the same time, I take the liberty of sending you my portrait, with the hope that you will kindly accept it.

With the assurance of my highest esteem and the expression of my deepest admiration, I remain, Your Excellency,

devotedly, Adolf Hitler

For the time being, however, this was the most significant step Mussolini felt able to take. Renzetti's reports indicate, in fact, that after Göring's trip to Rome, Hitler attempted in vain to meet (even secretly) with the Duce and repeatedly urged Renzetti to facilitate such a meeting.

At that time, however, Mussolini preferred to avoid such a risky move, one that could have put him in a difficult position. Hence the repetition of the same little ploy already tried in '28 (although this time some information leaked out, and by the end of '31 there was talk from various quarters of an imminent Mussolini-Hitler meeting): the first request (October '31) was met with a rather blunt refusal; then, in the face of repeated requests, a general acceptance was given (November '31), albeit with the clarification that Hitler would be a guest of the PNF and not of Mussolini (that is, of the government); but immediately afterward (January '32) came the postponement, justified by the domestic situation in Germany (presidential elections were to be held in March); After some time had passed, the process began again on nearly the same terms: In response to yet another request from Hitler (who, in the meantime, had garnered a full 13,400,000 votes in the second round of the presidential elections), a new "yes" arrived from Rome, but, once again, it was accompanied (June '32) by the advice to postpone the visit until a more opportune time—this time until the international situation had become clearer.

However, these same reports by Renzetti also show that, while maintaining such close contact with Hitler and his associates, their author was essentially working to promote the Stahlhelm and to first establish—and then attempt to sustain—the long-dreamed-of national front of the right, in order to make it an alternative force to the ruling parties and, above all, to trap Hitler and the NSDAP within it.

That this was, in fact, his true objective is clearly evident from the following passage from one of his reports dated November 20, 1931:

The disputes between the Nazis and the other right-wing groups continue. To try to resolve them, at least in part, I will bring together representatives of these groups at my home on Friday the 27th. I would like to achieve the merger of the German National Party into the National Socialist Party and make the Stahlhelm the militia of Hitler's party. Although there are significant difficulties standing in the way, I do not despair of succeeding.

Thirteen months later, upon Hitler's appointment as chancellor, Renzetti reportedly wrote with great satisfaction from Rome:

Seldte, Göring, Schacht, and many others have thanked me warmly, both yesterday and today, for what I have done to bring about the union of national forces. The Harzburg Front was born, as I have reported in the past, in my home: the agreement with the Helmets is due in very large part to me and to the meetings in Rome last November; finally, the meeting on the 1st of last month at my home also had its influence, and so on. And I am pleased with this recognition not only because it is given to a Fascist and an Italian for the work accomplished in so many fields.

In this brief summary, everything is true in a certain sense. What is glossed over is that the Harzburg Front had been supported by Renzetti not only to promote the growth of the right-wing parties but also to rein in Hitler, and that Renzetti had focused on the National Socialist cause only in the early months of 1932, when the front itself, after a series of crises that Mussolini's representative had tried in vain to resolve, had fallen apart on the eve of the presidential elections (when the German Nationalists and the Stahlhelm, faced with Hitler's refusal to grant them, in the event of a victory, the chancellorship and the Ministry of the Interior, had put forward their own candidate in the person of Duesterberg).

Only then had Renzetti committed himself fully to National Socialism and begun to view the reconstitution of the right-wing front primarily as a means to support Hitler's rise to the chancellorship.

And he had become one of Hitler's most influential and uncompromising advisors, both in the sense that he had always urged him to be very careful not to fall, out of haste, into the traps his adversaries were setting for him, and in the sense of encouraging him not to show any weakness toward his old comrades-in-arms.

Hitler wanted him by his side during the grand parade with which the National Socialists celebrated his appointment as chancellor, and he chose to entrust his very first message as the new chancellor to Mussolini to Renzetti rather than to the Italian ambassador.

Here is how Renzetti, on January 31, 1933, reported this conversation to Rome—a report of more than just historical significance:

Hitler summoned me to the Chancellery today to make the following statements: As Chancellor, I wish to tell you—so that you may convey this to His Excellency the Head of Government—that from my position I will pursue with all my strength the policy of friendship toward Italy that I have consistently advocated thus far.

Minister Neurath personally shares my views on this matter; however, there are many obstacles to overcome within the ministry itself. It is therefore not possible for me to accomplish everything I would like to do immediately. You know that I do not yet have the capable personnel to replace those who currently hold the various positions in the Foreign Ministry. My staff lacks experience. But I hope to gradually surround myself with people I trust. I would like to have a meeting with Mussolini, to whom I ask you, in the meantime, to convey my expressions of deep admiration and my regards.

Now I can go wherever I want. If necessary, I could fly to Rome, and if required, I could do so privately. I have certainly reached this point because of Fascism. While it is true that the two movements are different, it is equally true that Mussolini has realized the “Weltanschauung” that unites the movements themselves: without that realization, I might not have been able to attain this position. If it is true that ideas or systems are not exported, it is equally true that ideas spread on their own, just as rays and waves do.

I replied: I will convey to His Excellency, my Leader, what you have been kind enough to tell me. His Excellency the Head of Government—who, as you know, has always followed your movement and your work with the deepest sympathy—will be delighted by your success and will also be pleased to receive the message you have asked me to convey to him. I am fully aware of the difficulties you will have to overcome, but I am certain—just as I have been certain in the past of your sure success—that you will succeed in overcoming them.

Italian policy is simple: it aims to achieve a four-party agreement in Europe. To achieve this, Italy, Germany, and England would need to reach an understanding to force France either to remain isolated or to join the alliance. However, the four-party agreement cannot be achieved if one nation enters into a bilateral agreement with France itself.

Italy and Germany, in addition to a political and economic agreement, can forge another—one based on culture and ideals. The two nations aim, in fact—or rather, will aim from this day forward—to establish a new doctrine, a new political theory, in Europe. It is therefore necessary for both to see eye to eye in this area as well, in order to forge ideological bonds and to work together in support of the new revolutionary idea, which must spread throughout all of Europe to usher in a new era.

Hitler listened carefully to what I told him, nodded several times, and finally asked me to remain in close contact with him, with the same friendship as in previous years.

Although it was by then more or less a foregone conclusion, Hitler's appointment as chancellor caused a great stir and equally great concern in all European countries. Nor did the events in Germany in the months that immediately followed do anything to calm people's spirits.

The outcome of the March 5 elections and the first manifestations of state-sponsored anti-Semitism were perhaps the events that most shocked public opinion; at the level of political leadership, they were nothing less than confirmation of the gravity of the new situation that had arisen and further indications that there was no time to waste if one wished to keep Hitler's momentum in check in any way.

On the French side, Hitler's rise to power and the electoral victory of March 5 were met with the bleakest predictions—both for the immediate future and, above all, for the more distant future—and brought back to the surface the old and never-dormant fears of a German revanche. A revanche, moreover, which, according to many, would see Italy no longer allied with France but with Germany.

As for England, reactions there were also extremely violent and, in a certain sense, even more serious than in France. At that time, in fact, England was not only struggling with an extremely difficult economic situation but was also troubled by the Indian question and facing difficulties with the Dominions and self-governing colonies over the economic policies they were pursuing. In addition, Hitler's rise to power placed the government in serious difficulty, as it disrupted all the balances on which the Foreign Office's policy had hitherto been based, creating a situation of confusion and dismay in which even members of the ruling majority were putting forward views that were in direct contrast to government policy.

Hitler's rise to power also sparked a very widespread reaction in Italy. The daily press devoted ample space to it and offered a largely positive assessment, although various newspapers—including influential ones such as *Il Popolo d'Italia* and the *Corriere Padano*—had maintained a vaguely neutral stance toward Hitler and Schleicher and a few others in the weeks immediately preceding the event—especially *Il Regime Fascista* — had not spared harsh criticism of Hitler for his excessive parliamentary tendencies and his indecisiveness.

Some headlines may be indicative of how the "Führer's" appointment as chancellor was generally presented to the country: "Il popolo d'Italia": The collapse of the old demo-liberal systems worldwide; Adolf Hitler takes over the government in Germany with a coalition of all nationalist forces and former combatants (January 31); Hitler asserts that the triumph of the National Socialist idea is due to the glorious example of Rome (February 1); "Il resto del carlino": In the Footsteps of Fascism. Hitler, Chancellor of the Reich, leads Germany's young, reform-minded forces to power (January 31); "Il messaggero": The Will to Renewal. The Hitler Solution (January 31).

After these very first reports, however, one had to wait until the March 5 elections to find more comprehensive and in-depth analyses in the Fascist press. At most, one can note that in the run-up to the elections, some newspapers (such as the "Corriere padano" and "Il lavoro fascista") hinted at the hope that the polls would result in a balanced victory for the governing coalition—that is, that the National Socialists would not win by a landslide at the expense of their allies.

Only after the elections did the first genuine commentaries appear; on closer inspection, however, they were overall fewer in number than those published on previous occasions and, more importantly, continued to strike a generally cautious and noncommittal tone, especially regarding future Italian-

German relations.

Nor should one underestimate facts such as the fact that on March 7, *Il Popolo d'Italia* devoted its editorial not to the German elections but to a statement by Roosevelt in which the new American president indicated his intention to follow a course of action similar to Mussolini's, and used this as a pretext to extol the universality of fascism.

In the wake of a very vague statement issued on March 10 by the Grand Council ("The Grand Council… recognizes in the fascist movement spreading beyond Italy's borders the emergence of a new spirit that—directly and indirectly—draws sustenance and guidance from that solid body of doctrines and institutions through which Italy has created the modern state, a people's state, understood in its actual historical, organic, and living reality…"), even highly authoritative publications such as *Critica fascista* and *Gerarchia* itself (in an article by Renzetti) limited themselves either to recounting the events that had brought Hitler to power or to a few general references to the existence of a common ideal starting point in both Fascism and National Socialism.

There are various possible explanations for this attitude of the Fascist press. We will not dwell—having already discussed it at length—on the fundamental contradiction that, especially after 1930, characterized Fascism's position regarding German events and National Socialism; it is evident that in the new situation brought about by Hitler's rise to power, this contradiction became increasingly apparent: while National Socialism was still an opposition party, it was possible to try to ignore it, waiting to see how the German situation would unfold and, for the time being, focusing only on its advantages; now, however, this was becoming less and less possible, and—to varying degrees—even the Fascists realized this, even though most of them did not know how to extricate themselves from the situation.

A booklet published in Rome in early 1933, F. S. Giovannucci, *Hitler's Germany and Italy*, is exemplary in this regard and clearly illustrates the crisis into which Hitler's rise to power had plunged many fascists.

For its author, in fact, a clear distinction had to be made "between National Socialism as a party and National Socialism as a government," given that, once Hitler had come to power, the nature of the relationship between Fascism and National Socialism had changed completely: previously, the fact that a movement seemingly akin to his own was developing in Germany could have benefited Fascism to some extent; now Hitler's "racist, unionist, revisionist, ultra-nationalist" program was bound to compel Italy to carefully consider what its implementation would entail.

Another explanation lies in the direction of public opinion. Even though Fascism monopolized or controlled the entire press, the press could not fail to take into account that Hitler's rise to power had aroused in the country far more hostility—or at least fears and uncertainties—than sympathy, and above all a flurry of questions, the likes of which no other foreign event had provoked in a long time, and which also directly affected Mussolini, at least insofar as Fascist foreign policy concerned Italian-German relations and the issues directly and indirectly connected to them.

Aside from more strictly political considerations—which, moreover, concerned only fairly limited sectors—Hitler's rise to power, given his well-known revanchist intentions, had in fact reawakened in many veterans of the 1915–18 war memories, fears, and feelings that could not be underestimated; just as, on another level, one could not overlook the weight that the condemnations of National Socialism—issued in previous years by the German episcopate and widely reported at the time by the press,

especially the Catholic press—inevitably carried in the assessment of that movement.

Finally, in a country as largely untouched by anti-Semitism as Italy, one could not fail to take into account the impression created by the fact that Hitler's rise to power had been immediately followed in Germany by serious outbreaks of anti-Semitic intolerance—especially given the outcry they had sparked in many European and American countries. The fundamental explanation for the stance taken by the Italian press, however, lies above all in the character that Mussolini had immediately imprinted on Italian-German relations after January 30.

As soon as he was appointed chancellor, Hitler—as we have seen—had reiterated to Renzetti his desire to meet with the Duce and had reaffirmed his intention to pursue a policy of friendship with Italy.

Similar intentions had been conveyed to Mussolini through the Italian embassy in Berlin and the German embassy in Rome. Such a course of action on the part of the "Führer" was so widely expected that in various European capitals—and especially in Paris—people were immediately convinced that Hitler was primarily seeking to reach an agreement with Mussolini.

For example, a comprehensive report on the new situation in Germany, drafted on February 8, 1933, by the French ambassador to Berlin, François-Poncet, states:

First and foremost, Hitler's foreign policy is pro-Italian. To draw closer to Fascism, Hitler did not hesitate to sacrifice, in 1923, the Germans of South Tyrol under the pretext that friendship with Italy was worth more than a few hundred million Germans annexed by Rome south of the Brenner Pass. Today, the alliance with Rome seems to remain the cornerstone of Hitler's diplomatic edifice.

Adopting this line of reasoning, François-Poncet, as late as June, reportedly referred to the Italian ambassador in Berlin as a sort of "lord protector," an "extraordinary envoy" who was "treated as if he were himself a member of the Reich government," and to Hitler and his entourage as a group of people "who wish, above all, to follow the directives of Mussolini, whom they regard as their guardian and their teacher."

Setting aside François-Poncet's exaggerations, there is no doubt that Hitler sought friendship and, indeed, an alliance with Italy. Italian friendship, in fact, was not only a cornerstone of his political theory but, at that moment, was necessary for him—both to avoid international isolation and to distinguish his policy from the one that the Wilhelmstrasse (not yet under National Socialist control) tended to have him follow, as well as, looking ahead, to serve as a bridge to try to isolate France and establish friendship with England.

Mussolini's position, however, was different.

At that time, the Duce wanted above all to remain free from any specific commitments and to avoid difficulties in Europe. A partial and moderate fulfillment of some of the most pressing German demands (and, in parallel, Hungarian ones—both for reasons of prestige and to keep Budapest tied to

him and commit it as much as possible to the defense of Austria) was not ruled out by him; indeed, he hoped for it.

So much so that on March 2, he would have hinted to the French ambassador, De Jouvenel, at the advisability of granting “territorial contiguity between the two parts of Germany” (at Poland’s expense) and of returning “to Hungary the territories adjacent to its current borders, populated predominantly by Magyars.”

All of this, however, was to take place with the full agreement of the great powers and without resorting to force.

In addition to this, there were his plans for what would become the Four-Power Pact and his concerns regarding Austria, toward which the National Socialist stance was well known, and there is absolutely no reason to believe that he was willing to accept it, even if only as a long-term prospect.

Hence the extreme caution with which Mussolini responded to Hitler’s overtures and, consequently, the mutual distrust that very soon—contrary to many people’s expectations—characterized relations between Rome and Berlin, even though Mussolini tried for some time to present them in a better light than they actually were (so as to be regarded by the French and, above all, the British as the necessary intermediary to appease Hitler) and to lead Hitler to believe that he attributed the “misunderstandings” that gradually arose not to Hitler’s own will but to the “old” mentality of the Wilhelmstrasse—a mentality that was fundamentally unfavorable to Italy (typical in this regard were his “invitations” in May to Hitler, urging him to personally take charge of German foreign policy in order to remedy the disorder in that sphere).

Mussolini therefore responded to Hitler’s very first overtures by essentially stalling and avoiding making any commitments. As the ambassador to Rome, von Hassell, reported to Berlin on February 6, Mussolini replied to the new chancellor’s first communication by stating that:

He was extremely pleased with the coalition that had finally been formed. The conduct of those who had brought about this union—both Hitler and Papen—deserved high praise, and the latter had proven himself a man of valor and a perfect gentleman; once again, one could not help but feel particular admiration for the President of the Reich, who was the pillar of the government.

Once the newly formed coalition had been strengthened by the March elections—which he confidently anticipated—he was convinced that Germany and Italy would be able to pursue very similar policies, as their interests were closely intertwined on many important issues, such as disarmament policy, the economic conference, and positions regarding Southeast Europe.

As for the request for a meeting that Hitler had made through Renzetti—contrary to the rumors that had immediately begun to circulate suggesting the meeting was imminent—it was set aside for the time

being. In Rome, in fact, a visit by Hitler was at that moment anything but welcome. It was certainly not wanted before the outcome of the March 5 elections was known, nor was it wanted afterward, when, on the one hand, it became clear that the rapid radicalization of the domestic situation in Germany was causing growing alarm in many countries—especially in England—and, on the other hand, it was realized that an agreement with Hitler on the Austrian question would be impossible.

In this situation, as early as the beginning of the second half of March, the planned Mussolini-Hitler meeting had been effectively postponed indefinitely, and Rome and Berlin fell back on a visit, in the second ten-day period of April, by Göring and von Papen—which, moreover, failed to dispel in the slightest the atmosphere of mutual distrust that now characterized relations between the two governments.

As early as the beginning of April, even François-Poncet had begun to realize that, despite his pessimistic predictions from two months earlier, things were not going very well between Rome and Berlin:

the temperature of German-Italian friendship—he reported to Paris on April 5—has dropped by several degrees. The Chancellor's trip to Rome has been postponed. As far as can be judged from Berlin, Mussolini seems to have been pleased that the fascist formula has gained the support of a great power like Germany; but he also seems to have realized that, should this formula fail, Italian fascism would in turn suffer the repercussions. Does the Duce have absolute confidence in Hitler's genius and in the future of his government? That cannot be said for certain. In any case, the threat of a Hitler-led government taking power in Vienna has brought to the forefront—alongside the issue of the Anschluss—the problem of the influence of a nationalist Germany subject to Prussian dominance in the Danube basin; and Italian diplomacy has felt compelled to distance itself in a manner that has not escaped Germany's attention.

On the other hand, the anti-Jewish campaign provided the government in Rome—which had strongly advised the Imperial Cabinet against embarking on this path—with another reason to question Hitler's political wisdom.

Now, following Göring and von Papen's visit to Rome, the ambassador to Rome, De Jouvenel (who had always been less pessimistic about relations between Rome and Berlin than his Berlin counterpart), observed:

If we look back at the atmosphere in February, when Hitler's visit and his "consecration in Rome"—in the words of François-Poncet—seemed set to seal the triumph of united fascisms, one cannot help but notice a marked cooling of relations.

Italian-German relations are no longer what they once were, and even less what they promised to become.

To fully understand Mussolini's stance, one must bear in mind the close correlation that existed in recent months between Italian-German relations, the Austrian question, and the negotiations for the Four-Power Pact. It is commonly believed that Mussolini first alluded to the idea of what was to become the Four-Power Pact in his speech in Turin on October 23, 1932; we see no room for doubt whatsoever.

In fact, in the Turin speech, not only is there the first mention of the desirability of ensuring European peace through cooperation among the four great powers (France, England, Italy, and Germany), but some of the reasons why Mussolini considered an agreement among them necessary are also set forth.

On that occasion, in fact, after denying that Italy had adopted a Machiavellian attitude at the Disarmament Conference and asserting that it "pursues a policy of peace—true peace—which cannot be separated from justice; that peace which must restore balance to Europe; that peace which must take root in the heart, like hope and faith"—and that Italy would remain in the League of Nations because "today, when it is extraordinarily ill, we must not abandon its bedside"—he had said:

There have been attempts to extricate Europe from this overly universalistic construct. But I believe that if tomorrow, on the basis of justice, on the basis of the recognition of our sacrosanct rights—enshrined by the blood of Italy's younger generations—the necessary and sufficient conditions for cooperation among the four great Western powers were to be established, Europe would be at peace politically, and perhaps the economic crisis that is gripping us would come to an end.

There is another issue, namely the German demand for equality. Here, too, fascism had precise ideas and guidelines. The German demand for legal equality is fully justified. We must recognize this—the sooner, the better! At the same time, as long as the disarmament conference is in session, Germany cannot ask to rearm to any extent; but when the disarmament conference is over—and if it has yielded a negative result—then Germany cannot remain in the League of Nations unless this disparity, which has diminished it thus far, is eliminated.

We do not want hegemony in Europe. We will oppose the assertion of any hegemony, especially if it seeks to cement a situation of blatant injustice.

Less plausible, in our view, is the other opinion—though also widely held—that, following the Turin speech, the idea of the Four-Power Pact was only taken up, refined, and begun to be implemented by Mussolini in early March of the following year.

First, on the 2nd, during his meeting with French Ambassador De Jouvenel; then, on the 4th, at the Rocca delle Camminate, when he drafted the first outline of the pact; and finally, on the 9th, when he alluded to it in the Grand Council. In our view, in fact, Mussolini had been taking concrete steps toward the pact's objectives certainly since October 1932, and probably even earlier, from the time he had resumed leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Indirect evidence of this lies in the organization and character of the Volta Conference, and above all, clear evidence is provided by the words with which, as we have seen, Renzetti responded to the statement made to him by Hitler shortly after he assumed the chancellorship; in those words, in fact, the idea of the Four-Power Pact is set forth with such precision and prominence that it is absolutely impossible to conclude that this was a personal initiative by Renzetti, based solely on his knowledge of the Turin speech.

On the contrary, those words are the best evidence that Mussolini was already taking concrete steps toward the pact by the end of January and that, for him, it was closely linked—indeed, determined—by the evolution of the German political situation in 1932 and by the possibility—which the Duce already took for granted—of Hitler coming to power.

This is all the more evident given that, even before January 30, the pact was reportedly mentioned in Rome—probably to De Jouvenel (during his first meeting with Mussolini) and certainly to von Hassell (when Mussolini and Suvich informed him of the meeting Mussolini had had with the new French ambassador).

In early March, in fact, Mussolini simply moved from the preparatory phase to the implementation phase of an operation around which he had essentially structured all of Italy's foreign policy in recent months.

On March 22, Suvich—recounting to Grandi the early stages of the pact and the visit to Rome by MacDonald and Simon—wrote:

The Duce believed that this was the psychologically opportune moment to call upon the four Western Powers to collaborate with the aim of ensuring peace for a long period.

There is no doubt that the moment was psychologically favorable. In France, Hitler's rise to power—while it had led many to believe that Italy would align itself with Berlin and had intensified certain anti-Italian hostilities—had also prompted those who sought clarification and an agreement with Rome to accelerate efforts toward a last-ditch attempt in this direction, a process that had, after all, already

begun with the appointment as ambassador to Rome of one of its proponents, Henry de Jouvenel, as ambassador to Rome.

He had arrived in Rome on January 22 and immediately set to work exploring the possibilities for negotiations that would resolve the issues dividing the two countries. Until early March (in practice, until the eve of the German elections, when it was clear to everyone that Hitler was about to have his power ratified by the majority of the German people), the Italian side had, however, maintained an evasive stance, adopting a policy of neutrality, limiting itself practically only to denying (on February 15) the rumors regarding a secret alliance between Rome, Berlin, and Budapest.

Essentially, Italy had capitalized on France's growing fear of an Italian-German agreement and on the conviction that, at the opportune moment, the British would exert pressure on Paris to set aside the issue of bilateral relations for the time being and instead accept Mussolini's viewpoint—namely, that if one wished to avoid the formation of opposing blocs and keep Germany's inevitable rearmament under control, it was necessary to address directly the question of relations among the four great powers, and that only he, the Duce, was capable of bringing Hitler onto this ground.

And with this, Mussolini—let this be clear—was by no means giving up on the idea of bilateral agreements and thus on a settlement of relations with France; but he wanted to reach them after the Four-Power Pact had been signed, when his position would be much stronger, when Paris would no longer be able to be swayed by those who, for nationalistic or ideological reasons, still opposed an agreement with Italy or wanted it only on unfavorable terms and countered it with the need for a "bloc of democracies," and when such agreements would not have radicalized positions—as they had at that time—and exacerbated the situation.

Many internal documents from March and April prove that this was undoubtedly Mussolini's point of view.

Particularly clear is the minutes of a meeting on April 26 between Mussolini, Suvich, and Minister Galli in Belgrade; they show that, for the Duce:

Separate bilateral agreements may and perhaps certainly must follow the Four-Power Pact, not precede it. Without this Pact, an Italian-German agreement might immediately push France into war; a Franco-German agreement would be neither admissible nor acceptable to us, as we would find ourselves in an immediate position of inferiority and defenselessness; a Franco-Italian agreement would arouse suspicion and further exacerbate the situation.

Such bilateral agreements, however, if concluded following the Four-Power Pact, can be finalized without arousing the suspicion of the other two signatories, since the four great Powers are jointly bound to examine and resolve issues of European interest and to refrain from resorting to war.

As for Germany, that was also a psychologically favorable moment for it. Hitler had found himself in a very difficult, diplomatically deadlocked situation. Isolated from everyone and unable to count even on Italy, he needed to give his foreign policy some breathing room, avoid completely severing ties with Rome, and try to mend fences with London.

Although it conflicted in many respects with his plans, the Four-Power Pact would have provided him with a temporary way out of the impasse in which he found himself, and he could not, therefore, have opposed it.

François-Poncet clearly saw this when, on April 5, in the aforementioned report, he observed:

One must place oneself within the atmosphere of disappointment and perplexity that, in a certain sense, surrounded the early steps of Hitler's diplomacy in order to understand the sentiments with which Mussolini's proposed pact was received in Germany. Without even considering the potential drawbacks of this pact—which would risk imposing on the Hitlerian movement a form of control, a restraint, and concessions that would be difficult to reconcile with the fervor of nationalist sentiment—German diplomacy nonetheless saw in the Duce's proposals a means to regain England's favor and to achieve, with Italian patronage and support, the practical realization of equal rights, public recognition of the need for a revision of the treaties, and Germany's entry into the ranks of the great powers, alongside a Poland and a Little Entente that it continues to detest.

These were the gains that would not only have extricated Hitler's leaders from their predicament but which their skillful propaganda would have used to justify the new government's policy and to bolster its prestige in the eyes of the German public.

Nor should we underestimate the fact that—setting aside all other considerations—the Austrian issue was beginning to burn under Mussolini's feet, and that, therefore, involving Germany in the Four-Power Pact meant for him putting a brake on the National Socialist plans for the "gradual alignment" of the Austrian domestic regime with that of Germany (in other words, the National Socialist transformation of the Austrian regime) and, in the long run, the Anschluss: in fact, there is no doubt that at this time Mussolini was decidedly hostile to such a prospect and ready, in order to avert it, to take any step, even an agreement with Yugoslavia (whose king, in turn, apparently thought: "I'd rather see German sausages in Trieste than Italian macaroni"). Proof of this, once again, is the minutes of the meeting with Suvich and Galli on April 26:

The Anschluss is a danger that must be opposed—Von Papen and Göring have come for a meeting. But also for a confrontation. We cannot allow the Anschluss on our borders. Therefore, we must defend and support Austria. We also have a second line of defense, namely a Rome-Belgrade-Budapest agreement. A further line of defense may be envisaged at a later stage in the form of a Mediterranean quartet comprising Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The agreement with Yugoslavia is essential in light of the threat that may come to us from the Anschluss.

As for disarmament, we must choose between a Germany that rearms tacitly and at will, and a Germany that rearms under an agreement and subject to oversight. The Four-Power Pact guarantees France, more than any other arrangement, that German rearmament will be under its control.

Extending arms parity to the other powers defeated in the war does not substantially alter the strategic situation in Yugoslavia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia; and since this could not take place for at least ten years (due to the need for gradual implementation, guarantees, controls, etc.), there is no reason for the Little Entente to be concerned about it today.

And this is further proven by this truly telling dispatch to Grandi, dated May 31, when the pact seemed on the verge of finally coming to fruition:

As soon as the four-power pact is signed and the initial commentary that will accompany it in the first few days has subsided, it is necessary to launch—through our British newspaper friends—a campaign in defense of Austria as an independent state with its own history, geography, and role in the Danube basin. You know my views on both the Rhine and the Danube perfectly well.

As for England, finally, it was at that moment the true linchpin of Mussolini's entire strategy. Although there were those in London who would have liked to see a revival of the Entente, the British government was itself seeking a way out at that time, even if it could not find one.

That was therefore the best moment to offer MacDonald and Simon such a way out, committing them to go easy on Paris in exchange for Italy's commitment to do the same with Berlin—especially if, along with this commitment, Rome was willing—as it was—to offer them the guarantee that at the Disarmament Conference the Fascist government would support the British plan and not the utterly unrealistic French one. All the more so because waiting any longer would have been dangerous, both because of the turn the Austrian situation might have taken in the meantime and because Mussolini was aware that if London had to choose between Rome and Paris, the choice would certainly have been in favor of Paris; therefore, pushing things too far would have been an unnecessary risk.

From this perspective, it is understandable why Mussolini preferred to keep De Jouvenel under pressure for about a month and a half and, after briefly mentioning his plan to him on March 2 (brief but sufficient to win him over completely and make him a staunch supporter of his policy), he launched his project through the British; and it is also clear why he showed such goodwill in accepting the

proposed amendments to the text of the pact he had drafted—first put forward by the British themselves and then, on several occasions, by both the French (who were the most hostile and concerned) and the Germans.

Setting aside the exalted and fawning tone, Grandi was in fact correct when he wrote from London on March 24 that, even if the pact were to be amended, what mattered was having proposed it at that moment and having secured the other great powers' general endorsement; what would follow would ultimately be far less important, both in terms of the global impact it would have and the shift it would inevitably bring about in the European situation and in Italy's relations with Germany and, above all, with France:

As I already telegraphed last night, yesterday's session in the Chamber of Deputies was a clear confirmation of your colossal diplomatic success during these historic days in Rome. The plan you conceived and drafted (your style is inimitable) is, as a diplomatic document, such a masterpiece of finesse that it makes one want to applaud, and you played your hand with such timely skill as only a genius can do in the great moments of the nation's life, which he holds in his grasp.

Even if the outline of the Pact were to encounter difficulties or undergo modifications along the path it must inevitably take before its formal acceptance, this is now, in my view, of only minor importance.

You have already delivered the checkmate—and, in my view, you delivered it all at once to England, France, and even Germany. No one will ever be able to erase the surge of enthusiasm the whole world felt for you.

Hitler's victory in Germany (March 5) was leading, through the dismay caused by the event, to a stalemate among the powers governed by democracies. Over the past fortnight, people in this country have been speaking of the Franco-British Entente just as they did on the eve of the 1914 war—no more, no less.

The harsh speech Churchill delivered last night in the House of Commons confirms this fact. With a single decisive blow, you have shattered the alliance plans of the French, British, and perhaps American democracies. You have dealt a fatal blow to France. You have shown Hitler's Germany that your friendship is based exclusively on your prestige and your strength, and at the same time you have warned Berlin, in a courteous but firm manner, not to engage in "more Teutonic" follies on the international stage.

The reader will find in the Appendix the texts of Mussolini's initial draft and the final text of the Four-Power Pact. By comparing the two texts, one can gain a clear picture of the profound changes the pact underwent during the long and grueling negotiations that preceded its signing.

Since it is obviously not appropriate here to go into the details of these negotiations, we will limit ourselves to highlighting only the most significant aspects.

On the British side, the proposal met with considerable approval, especially at first. London's stance, however, gradually became more cautious as hostility toward Germany grew in England (especially regarding the issue of anti-Semitism) and as uncertainties and disagreements arose within the governing majority and the Foreign Office regarding whether an agreement with Hitler was advisable if he did not first clarify his position on disarmament and if the pact itself would put England at risk of losing its close ties with France.

Indeed, as early as MacDonald and Simon's visit to Rome on March 18 and 19—when Mussolini officially presented his plan—it had already become clear that the British were concerned about how the French would receive the plan and, more generally, about the reactions that would come from the other countries excluded from the negotiations.

This led to a series of changes they requested, which Mussolini agreed to almost without batting an eye—even where these changes might, in the long run, make it more difficult to carry out his plans for the future, as in the case of the removal of any reference to unresolved colonial issues.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, apart from the Italians, of course, the British were the most supportive of the pact and the ones who were most generous in their praise of Mussolini (on May 16, for example, Simon asked Grandi to convey to the Duce "this precise thought" of his

"namely, that all of Europe must be grateful to the Head of the Italian Government for the work he has carried out during these difficult weeks, whether in Paris, Berlin, or even Vienna. There is no doubt that it is thanks to Mr. Mussolini and his diplomatic efforts over the past two weeks that Europe has not lost its head"). And, most importantly, it was essentially they who, following Hitler's moderate speech to the Reichstag on May 17, set in motion the final, decisive phase of the negotiations, drawing the French along with them.

For Germany, as has been noted, the pact had primarily instrumental value; it was particularly interested in its revisionist aspects and those that could take on an anti-social and "hierarchical" significance.

Hitler and a large part of the National Socialist leadership also saw it as a means to accommodate Mussolini, counterbalance the negative consequences of the disputes over Austria, and improve relations with Italy.

From this perspective, there was a difference of opinion between them and the Wilhelmstrasse, which Mussolini had recognized and exploited—both by showing Hitler that he took the future of his power to heart and offering him a whole series of recommendations to that end, and by appealing directly to him during the most difficult moments, in order to convince him to adopt a more realistic stance and not to place insurmountable obstacles in the way of concluding the negotiations.

A typical example of this is what he instructed Ambassador Cerruti to convey to Hitler on his behalf on May 13:

It is my opinion that we must expedite the conclusion of the Four-Power Pact in the general interest of restoring more peaceful political conditions in Europe, which is in everyone's interest, and especially in the interest of Germany, which needs some calm on the international stage at a time when it must devote itself to its own internal reconstruction.

To achieve this end, it seems to me that the Four-Power Pact is the best solution.

There is no need to dwell on the fact that, even at the time I proposed the Four-Power Pact, I took into account—I would say as the prevailing factors—the interests of Germany, which had to be safeguarded in order to create a better balance among the European powers. I believe I have significantly advanced those interests by adopting the following principles in the Four-Power Pact:

1) Preliminary discussion of the most important and sensitive issues affecting European and global foreign policy within a select group of Powers, where the balance of power—as compared to that of the League of Nations—has radically shifted in Germany's favor [compared to] the situation within the League of Nations.

2) More precisely reaffirming the principle of the possible revision of the peace treaties, giving it a contemporary relevance through the creation of a specific body in which the relevant issues are to be examined in the first instance.

3) Germany's right to the practical implementation of the principle of equal rights in the field of armaments has been affirmed, with the specification of certain rules for its application.

While these principles, which I set forth through the Four-Power Pact, might have been considered favorable to Germany at the time the Four-Power Pact was proposed, it seems to me that today—given the greater difficulties Germany faces abroad—they have acquired a wholly special importance and significance.

Now, precisely because of all these obvious and insurmountable difficulties, I had counted on

Germany's cooperation and support—cooperation and support which, I repeat, in my view would have primarily benefited Germany itself. On the contrary, I have had to note with regret that Germany's attitude, rather than facilitating the task, makes it more difficult for me. On a matter as delicate as that addressed by the Four-Power Pact—and at a time so fraught with tension—it is evident that a conclusion can only be reached if all parties involved adopt a spirit of compromise.

On Germany's part, however, I am faced with an attitude that continually complicates the situation by putting forward other proposals that would require restarting the discussion from the beginning, on an entirely new basis…

Apart from this practice of constantly putting forward radically altered proposals—which makes any discussion difficult—it seems to me that Germany's concern with establishing concrete solutions right now, which are to be the subject of discussions among the four, is an approach that does not serve the intended purpose.

For me, the important thing is for the four of us to come together on the issues that must be discussed and then seek the best solution. If we were to try to set the solution right now as part of the discussion on the Four-Power Pact, I believe that would not serve the general interest—nor even that of Germany.

It is evident, for a number of reasons that need not be repeated, that if an agreement is to be reached at this time on a concrete program for the rearmament of Germany, it certainly will not satisfy Germany's own aspirations; whereas, if we establish that this issue must be discussed among the four—with continuous pressure from Germany and through subsequent agreements—we can certainly arrive at much more favorable solutions, as demonstrated by past practice regarding reparations. Of course, this assumes that we wish to follow the path of agreements; for if Germany were instead to pursue the path of rearmament without regard for the treaties and without agreements with the others, then the matter would have to be reexamined from an entirely different perspective.

It was most likely precisely in response to this message from the Duce—and the conviction that Mussolini, with his back against the wall, would press ahead on his own even without Germany—that Hitler softened his previous stance in the Reichstag regarding the Geneva disarmament negotiations and declared himself in favor of the Four-Power Pact; and, subsequently (also concerned by Roosevelt's proposal for a "general pact" among all the powers, which would have signaled renewed U.S. interest in Europe and an increase in the influence of France and its allies), sent Göring on a second special mission to Rome—effectively bypassing the Wilhelmstrasse—to reach an agreement on the text of the pact itself and, above all, to obtain guarantees from Mussolini regarding the pact's implementation after it came into force, so as to assure Germany that the revisionist character the pact

had been gradually losing through the various amendments introduced by the French would not fade away entirely.

Apart from the usual vague statements about the fundamental convergence of Italian and German interests and the spirit of friendship toward Germany that animated the Duce, Göring obtained virtually no guarantees. However, matters had by then reached such a point that Hitler could no longer back down.

On May 31, at Palazzo Chigi, the pact was finally initialed by Suvich and the three ambassadors in Rome. As is well known, however, the initialing did not put an end to the already arduous negotiations. France, in fact, immediately disavowed De Jouvenel's signature, asserting that he had become confused and had accepted a text for Article 3 that the French government had not approved.

Among the participants in the negotiations, the French had been the most uncertain and recalcitrant from the very beginning. We have already mentioned British concerns regarding this attitude.

For his part, Mussolini, by personally delivering the text of his draft to De Jouvenel on March 18, had sought to present it in the most acceptable way to Paris:

If the regime in Germany grows stronger, it will be difficult to contain German ambitions abroad. On the contrary, Hitler is currently sufficiently preoccupied with domestic politics that he cannot be goaded into focusing on foreign affairs… I am convinced that Daladier and Paul-Boncour are as convinced as I am that it is in France's interest to come to an understanding with England and Italy to keep Germany in check.

You see, the situation today is such that it forces us to make a choice: either we align ourselves in pairs —England and France on one side, Italy and Germany on the other—to face off bloc against bloc, and we head toward the gravest of events; or the four of us will come to an understanding to collaborate, and Europe and the world will begin to breathe easier.

Despite this clear statement by Mussolini and despite the evident inclination toward the MacDonald-Simon pact, the French position was ambiguous from the outset. While Paris, through Daladier and Paul-Boncour in the Chamber of Deputies, made generally encouraging statements, it immediately adopted a highly critical stance toward the plan as formulated by Mussolini.

For the Quai d'Orsay (and, in its wake, gradually for many politicians who had not initially been hostile), the pact not only favored Germany and encouraged Hitler's revisionism, but also disrupted the entire French system: it weakened the League of Nations, strained the special relationship with England, undermined the French system of alliances, caused France to lose its hegemony and freedom of movement in Europe, and deprived it of the ability to negotiate a potential rapprochement with Berlin directly.

Furthermore, among the political class and the mainstream press, many in Paris still distrusted Italy and Mussolini and, in any case, would have preferred that the Franco-Italian dispute be resolved before—rather than after—France had made such a significant commitment, and that Mussolini accept the Quai d'Orsay's Danube-Balkan policy.

Proceeding from such short-sighted and unproductive premises, the French side sought throughout the course of the negotiations to fundamentally transform the pact, so as to render it a harmless and ineffective instrument, while at the same time making it as useful as possible to its own traditional policy.

They did this both by acting directly during the four-party negotiations and by encouraging the mistrust and hostility of the countries excluded from the pact—primarily those of the Little Entente and Poland—and by acting as their spokesperson.

This led to a gradual hardening of these countries' positions; at first, they sought—citing their supposed status, collectively or individually, as great powers—to join the new "Peace Club" (as MacDonald had called it), but then, seeing their efforts thwarted, lashed out against it, accusing it of being (in the words of a French journalist) a "Club des charcutiers" and of seeking to establish a hierarchy among states and, thus, to assume for itself—as a sort of European "directoire"—the leadership of international affairs and decisions regarding the fate of other countries.

This gradual hardening of positions contributed significantly to strengthening and expanding the ranks of those in France who opposed the pact and who, like Herriot, were able to argue that "either the Four-Power Pact means nothing, or it is a cause for concern for Poland and the Little Entente," so that "either the Four-Power Pact is useless, or it is dangerous."

Mussolini initially sought to respond to this second aspect of the French countermaneuver—perhaps the most dangerous, certainly the most difficult to counter, and, in the long run, the one posing the greatest risks to the effective implementation of the pact—with an effort at international clarification whose good faith is difficult to dispute.

Typical in this regard is the following circular telegram sent to a number of Italian diplomatic missions, in which, on April 2, he outlined the guidelines for explaining the pact's guiding principles in the various capitals and countering the criticisms leveled against it:

I summarize below the main points of the Pact discussed in Rome:

1) Solemn confirmation of the principles of the Kellogg Pact and the "No-Force Pact" in relations among the four Powers and toward third parties.

2) Reaffirmation of the principle allowing for the revision of treaties as provided for in the Covenant of the League of Nations; the application of this principle must be carried out within the framework of the

League of Nations and with due regard for the interests of the parties concerned.

3) In the event that the Disarmament Conference fails to achieve concrete results, Germany would be authorized to implement the principle of equality of rights gradually and through agreements reached among the four Powers.

4) Extends the provisions of Article 3 to Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

5) Provides for cooperation among the four Powers to resolve European and global economic problems.

6) It provides for the ratification of the Pact by the parliaments of the states concerned and sets its duration at ten years, renewable unless terminated.

7) Provides for the deposit of the Pact with the Secretariat of the League of Nations.

I draw your attention to the following points:

1. The Italian Government has clearly realized that the historical process currently unfolding, if left to its own devices, would inevitably lead to the formation of opposing groups, thus returning to the situation prior to 1914.

The Italian Government is of the opinion that the only effective way to halt this process and ensure lasting peace in Europe is to establish a foundation for collaboration and cooperation among the four Western Powers. This agreement is a natural development and completion of the Locarno Pact.

2. The Italian proposal does not aim to establish a rigid hierarchy between great and small powers—apart from the fact that powers such as Russia, the United States, and Japan are excluded from it—but is based on a situation that has always existed in Europe, namely that peace and prosperity in Europe can be ensured only through the agreement—not the division—of the four great powers.

3. Only acceptance of the Pact can save the Disarmament Conference from complete failure by creating an atmosphere of greater trust and understanding and by shifting to another arena the resolution of the major political issues whose entanglement with the question of disarmament proper has brought the Conference to its current impasse.

4. The objection raised against the Pact is that it amounts to a sort of Directory to which European policy would be delegated. The fact is that any notion of coercion is entirely foreign to the spirit of the Pact; moreover, in the current situation, every issue involving third countries is influenced by the state of relations among the four Powers and could therefore hardly be examined impartially. The result of the Pact would be that, as issues arise, they would be considered with objectivity and a spirit of cooperation, taking due account of the legitimate interests of the parties involved.

5. Finally, I note that it is not accurate to say that the Pact implies a devaluation of the League of Nations, since in both spirit and form it fits within the framework of the Geneva organization. In this regard, and in whatever form you deem most appropriate, you may draw upon the arguments set forth in point 4.

Later, however, the Duce's stance hardened, and he explicitly attacked the Little Entente in an article written for a major chain of foreign newspapers. In it, after denying that the Little Entente could aspire to the role of a "fifth great power," he accused Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania of being the "new rich" of the Danube region and reminded them that "the revisionist idea is on the march" and that they would not be the ones to stop it "because the world wants peace, wants a long period of peace, and feels that this immense desire of its own will remain unfulfilled if peace is not accompanied by justice."

Aside from this outburst, however, throughout the negotiations Mussolini remained extremely accommodating—almost submissive—toward French demands. In practice, he accepted nearly all proposals to amend the text of the pact, doing everything in his power to ensure its successful conclusion. So much so that Ambassador De Jouvenel (the only French official who was a sincere supporter of the pact and, for this reason, repeatedly at odds with the Quai d'Orsay) would eventually observe that the entire text of the pact had become French—that is, it had incorporated nearly all of Paris's subsequent requests.

Despite this—as mentioned—immediately after the initialing, Paris once again attempted to derail the pact. Indeed, there is no other way to explain De Jouvenel's disavowal of his signature and Paul-Boncour's incredible proposal to delete—to avoid further controversy—the entire Article 3, the only one that, after so many revisions, still contained something dear to Germany: the reference to the principle of equal rights and its implementation "in stages." The only purpose such an initiative could therefore have been to provoke Germany's withdrawal from the negotiations.

Faced with such a decisive turn of events, however, the basic agreement between Italy and England held firm. Simon intervened forcefully with Paris, making it known that, should the Quai d'Orsay persist in its course of action, he would be forced "to make public the terms on which we are willing to agree and, conversely, the difficulties that stand in the way. This would entail embarrassing revelations that I would obviously wish to avoid."

Mussolini made a very similar statement a few days later, on June 6, in the Senate:

The negotiations on the Pact for Cooperation and Understanding among the four powers of Western Europe have reached a stage that may soon, one way or another, prove to be conclusive. For this reason, I reserve the right, if necessary, to speak with Simon tomorrow…

Simon through diplomatic channels, he had warned Paris; from the government bench in the Senate, however, Mussolini had addressed Berlin instead. After the British move, a new text for Article 3 had in fact been agreed upon with the French; however, it was so innocuous and made no mention whatsoever of equal rights that the Germans did not seem willing to accept it. Hence Mussolini's warning to Hitler not to throw up a new and decisive obstacle to the conclusion of these painstaking negotiations. And the very next day, the pact was definitively signed. Paris had further "Frenchified" the pact, but its last-ditch maneuver to scuttle it had failed.

Nevertheless, this two-stage birth was certainly not a good omen for the nascent pact, which, in fact, would prove virtually unviable. Moreover, just as it had come into being after two and a half months of negotiations, even if it had survived, its value would have been more political in the broad sense (that is, it could have served as a framework for further specific agreements) than actually operational. The gradual hollowing out to which the original framework had been subjected had, in fact, rendered it virtually devoid of concrete content and incapable of directly resolving any of the European issues on the table.

Despite all this, the Four-Power Pact was considered a success not only by Mussolini but also by Italian diplomats—and not merely in terms of propaganda and prestige.

On the afternoon of June 7, before attending the signing ceremony, Mussolini delivered the speech to the Senate that he had announced the day before—a speech that warrants close examination, as it offers insights into why the Duce regarded the pact as his own success. Broadly speaking, the speech can be divided into three parts.

The first concerned the origins and historical-political context of the pact. The pact was closely linked to the Locarno Pact and to the commitments to effective collaboration that stemmed from it for the four great powers. This connection allowed Mussolini to reiterate that, in his view, "much of the opposition aroused by the Pact is the result of emotional reactions rather than a thoughtful examination of reality": the pact did not, in fact, establish definitive and immutable hierarchies; it was not directed against anyone; it did not seek to impose anything on anyone; nor did it aim to lay the groundwork for any potential united front against anyone; it operated in the spirit and letter of the Covenant of the League

of Nations and aimed “to reestablish the balance among all the articles of the Covenant, as is indispensable if one wishes to carry out constructive and lasting work.”

The pact sought only to ensure cooperation among the great powers and, therefore, peace. Only in this climate, Mussolini implied, would it be possible to proceed with the peaceful revision of the treaties that the Geneva Pact itself provided for:

A vociferous anti-revisionist campaign is currently underway in certain countries, but people are overlooking the admissions contained in Benès’s recent extensive speech to the Prague Parliament… In his speech… Benes did not declare himself anti-revisionist in perpetuity, but made any attempt at revision contingent upon the existence of certain conditions, namely: a period of general calm, the possibility of reciprocal concessions, and the actual scope of the revision. Neither in the original draft nor, even less so, in the subsequent ones was there ever any question of the four powers imposing any revision of the treaties by force. Since the end of the war—this one as well as all those that preceded it—a process of adapting the peace treaties has been underway. It would be pointless, indeed dangerous, to deny that this process exists and that it has often proceeded amid difficulties far more serious than those that would have existed in an atmosphere of greater mutual trust and understanding.

Mussolini devoted the second part of his speech—the weakest of all—to attempting to demonstrate (both as a matter of prestige and to offer Hitler a sort of consolation prize, while trying not to give him the impression that, in the final analysis, he had agreed to many of the amendments proposed by the French) that, despite all the changes, the fundamental principles of his original plan had remained unchanged.

Far more important to us is the third part, devoted to “the contribution made to the negotiations by the individual states and, above all, the spirit in which the negotiations took place.”

The highly effusive words dedicated to England certainly come as no surprise, both because of the actual role the British had played in the negotiations and in supporting the substance of the Italian position, and because of the Duce’s traditional policy of friendship with London, and also because Mussolini had every interest in distinguishing Italy and England from France and Germany among the four nations in order to attribute to them a certain impartial status. Significant in this regard is the final sentence of the section of the speech devoted to England’s role:

The balanced position that England and Italy—by virtue of their situation and the natural factors that characterize them—are called upon to represent in Europe, and for which the Locarno Pact assigns them a special function, finds in the Four-Power Pact a new expression and new possibilities for fruitful and constructive developments.

What might seem surprising at first glance, however, are the words dedicated to Germany and, above all, to France. Mussolini acknowledged that Germany had demonstrated a “keen desire for cooperation” and sought peace rather than war. Hitler, with his speech on May 17—a “morally courageous and politically reassuring speech”—had done much to dispel the self-serving fears, the “specter of war,” that his opponents had been raising.

Germany was a reality that could not be ignored; this was self-evident to Mussolini, just as it was self-evident that it was “at the very least risky” to judge National Socialist Germany “by the standards of prewar Germany.” His speech, however, did not go any further for the time being: it was, in fact, up to Germany to demonstrate that it was truly in line with Hitler’s speech of May 17:

Germany lies at the heart of Europe with its imposing population of sixty-five million; with its history, its culture, and its needs; a truly European policy aimed at maintaining peace cannot be pursued without Germany, and—worse still—such a policy can be pursued even less against Germany, the more Germany directs its international actions in accordance with the essential points contained in Hitler’s programmatic speech.

These words lend a very special significance to what Mussolini had said earlier when discussing the various articles of the pact.

According to the agreed-upon formula—he had said—the four governments reaffirm in Article 3 their determination to make every effort to ensure that the disarmament conference achieves favorable results.

The declaration of December 11, 1932, regarding equal rights for Germany and other states disarmed by treaty must have practical effect as intended by the declaration itself. It is evident that if the conference were to fail, a very serious—indeed, untenable—situation would arise. This scenario can only be raised in order to rule it out; but since, despite everything, this possibility could arise, the Pact takes it into account and makes provision for it.

Article 3 thus stipulates that, for matters not resolved by the conference, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy would resume their examination of them among themselves—naturally with due respect for all matters concerning the other states—through the application of the Pact of Understanding and Cooperation, in order to ensure a solution in an appropriate manner.”

In light of the passage cited above, it seems difficult not to interpret this as well as a warning to Hitler. This is all the more so because, when speaking of France’s role, Mussolini—despite everything that had happened—adopted a substantially different tone. He lavished high praise on the French government and France’s role in Europe:

Biased and contradictory rumors have been spread regarding France's stance on the Four-Power Pact. The truth is quite different. The Daladier Ministry never flatly rejected the Italian government's initiative. It is no wonder that the French government wished to carefully weigh the pros and cons of the plan… We must fairly acknowledge that the French government has strenuously fought against the tide—that is, against the interests, sentiments, and concerns prevalent in the French mindset—and has overcome all of this because it is deeply convinced of the soundness of the principles underlying the Pact. France has set an example of cooperation on the European stage for which it deserves credit.

And, most importantly, it made it clear that, while it believed Germany still had to demonstrate its genuine willingness to put Hitler's programmatic statements of May 17 into practice, the situation was different for France, and it was already possible to move on to the phase of resolving bilateral issues:

In the improved atmosphere created by the Four-Power Pact, it is perfectly possible to swiftly resolve certain specific issues dividing Italy and France—as already advocated by Mr. Herriot—as well as others that may concern Germany and France. Now that the signing of the Pact has established a new situation of mutual trust and cooperation, the pending issues between France and Italy take on, within the new framework of European politics, a different character than they have had thus far, and the possibilities for a solution become more feasible.

As D'Amoja rightly noted, this distinction that Mussolini drew between France and Germany clearly indicates that, with the conclusion of the negotiations for the Four-Power Pact, Italy's neutral stance had become less rigid than it had been in the preceding months; even at the time of the Turin speech—that is, when Hitler had not yet come to power—it was "concretely directed against France and only virtually or potentially directed against Germany in the distant future"; now "the roles seemed to have been reversed; the scale of danger had been turned upside down."

This was certainly influenced to a considerable extent by the rapid deterioration—as we shall see—of the situation in Austria following Hitler's rise to power, and by the repercussions this had on relations between Rome and Berlin. It is difficult, however, to believe that Mussolini's stance had changed solely for this reason.

Objectively speaking, one must concede that this attitude had deeper roots and broader—and, to a certain extent, more realistic—European and colonial perspectives than those that had motivated France—regardless of what Mussolini sought to make people believe in his Senate speech—during the negotiations for the Four-Power Pact and that would continue to drive it in the months to come.

Thus, at least in broad terms, it seems to us that Serra is essentially correct when he writes:

However unpredictable Mussolini's every move might have been… it seems difficult to deny that French diplomacy played into Germany's hands at this stage. On the one hand, by helping to reestablish the recently rekindled friendship between Hitler and Mussolini, and on the other, by stripping of all substance a pact that might have served, perhaps, to rein in Hitler's ambitions (who three months later decided on Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations), or at the very least to keep the Duce's willingness to cooperate alive.

To fully assess the significance—not only tactical but also strategic—that the Four-Power Pact held for Mussolini and how it fit into the broader context of his policy, one cannot, however, limit oneself to examining the events that led to its signing, nor to the assessment the Duce gave of it in the Senate.

On the contrary, the analysis must also extend to the diplomatic events of the following months—those directly connected to the pact, that is, those that occurred by mid-November 1933, as well as subsequent events spanning the entire year of 1934.

From this complex set of events, one can in fact glean a series of elements that allow for a precise understanding of the fundamental lines along which Mussolini operated in the two years following Hitler's rise to power and to realize how, during this period, his policy essentially continued to be one of decisive influence, even if, obviously, adapted to the new situation. In particular, it can be said:

a) after the conclusion of the Four-Power Pact, even though he did everything he could to hide it, Mussolini continued to distance himself more and more from Germany, so that in reality Rome's purported equidistance from Paris and Berlin was merely a facade that, on a diplomatic level, fooled no one, but which served the Duce for both domestic and international reasons: to continue playing the role—which he had assumed by proposing the Four-Power Pact—of mediator, or, as a Belgian diplomat put it with a clear hint of sarcasm, "Prince of Peace"; to distinguish fascism from democracy and National Socialism even in foreign policy; to avoid committing to France before obtaining real concessions in return (and in the hope of gaining something from Germany in the meantime as well), which, by keeping matters in limbo, he likely intended to make even more substantial; and, finally, as was his nature, to avoid irreparably compromising himself prematurely and, thus, on the one hand, to leave open the possibility of a change of heart (which, at that moment, might even have been justifiable given England's reluctance to commit beyond a certain point on the continent) and, on the other hand, to forgo the prospect of pursuing his own policy, independent of any other;

b) as a result, even as he drifted further and further away from Germany, Mussolini sought, as long as he was able (July 1934), not to openly oppose Germany and, in particular, to avoid a formal crisis in his personal relations with Hitler and, above all, to publicly differentiate Italian policy from that of France and England, so as to make it appear as autonomous as possible and, depending on the circumstances and issues, to give it a flexible, impartial, mediating, and oscillating character; Typical in this regard is the final reference in the aforementioned dispatch to Grandi dated May 31, 1933, to the Rhine and the Danube—that is, to the advisability of a policy closer to Berlin on issues such as disarmament and closer to Paris on issues such as the Austrian question;

c) The fulcrum, the focal point of this policy, gradually proved to be the Austrian question, which during this period constituted for Mussolini the problem of all problems—the one in light of which all others had to be viewed, given that these would take on a different value and perspective depending on how that problem was resolved; the Austrian question—depending on how it unfolded—might even have called for a rebalancing of Italy's equidistance or even a reversal of course, and thus a rapprochement with Berlin; or, at the opposite extreme—if resolved according to Mussolini's intentions—it would have demonstrated that Italy's special position was not—as Vansittart argued— a "perishable asset" that would therefore lose value over time—but a decisive element of the new European situation that everyone would have to reckon with and that, consequently, would have allowed Italy to resolve its outstanding issues with France not only on the best terms but, in practice, without completely sacrificing its autonomy and, thus, the possibility of continuing to assert its decisive influence in the future;

d) from this perspective, for Mussolini, the changes his plan had undergone earlier and the difficulties subsequently encountered by the Four-Power Pact—up to and including its failure to enter into force following Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations on October 19, 1933 (which rendered it inapplicable, given the links it established with the Geneva Covenant)—clearly held only relative importance; aside from the more strictly propagandistic and prestige-related aspects, what mattered to him was that the pact had prevented the formation of two opposing blocs and offered Italy the opportunity to assume—and see practically recognized—its special position; nor can it be ruled out that he viewed its failure to enter into force favorably, since it allowed him, for the time being, to postpone the conclusion of the bilateral agreement with Paris, while at the same time leaving him the possibility—if he deemed it useful—to revive the idea of the pact, whether with the same partners, as a trio, or with five or more participants, depending on the purpose it was intended to serve.

Following the controversies of 1924–26 and their aftermath in 1928, Italian-Austrian relations had entered a new phase by the end of 1929, when the conservative Schober became chancellor—a phase markedly different from that of previous years, when fears of the Anschluss, the South Tyrol issue, and the presence of a strong Social Democratic Party had caused Rome to view Austria with extreme suspicion and hostility. Once the crisis surrounding the Austro-German project of "economic assimilation" in 1931 had passed, the following year, the appointment as chancellor of the Christian Social Dollfuss—who leaned more toward the right than the center and was firmly opposed to the Anschluss—not only improved relations between Rome and Vienna but also contributed significantly to providing Mussolini's policy with an important point of reference and a perspective that, if not new, was certainly more concrete.

Until then, Italy had addressed the threat of the Anschluss through diplomatic channels. It was only around 1929 that other "parallel" means of influencing Vienna began to take on a certain weight in Austrian policy at Palazzo Chigi. Through secret contacts (which were particularly ambiguous at first, given that even the National Socialists were not entirely uninvolved) with the Heimwehren—a right-wing paramilitary organization—and with one of their leading figures, Prince Starhemberg—a peculiar figure, a man of high standing, nationalist, conservative, and pro-fascist, who, incidentally, would go on to fight in the Allied air force during World War II—the Italians had in fact begun to consider the possibility of pressuring the Austrian government to take a firmer stance against Pan-Germanist elements, who in Germany and Austria were working toward the Anschluss and, more generally, toward a more decidedly pro-Italian policy.

Overall, however, this approach had not yielded tangible results and had involved a considerable degree of ambiguity and risk, given that a portion of the Heimwehren also had ties to the National

Socialists, who, in turn, tended to form a unified electoral bloc with them.

Dollfuss's appointment as chancellor (May 1932) and Hitler's rise to power in Germany eight months later had paved the way and necessitated a complete overhaul of Austria's entire policy toward Italy.

Within this policy, Starhemberg and his movement had assumed an increasingly prominent role—both as a parliamentary political force that Dollfuss could not do without, as a means of exerting pressure on him, and, finally, as a counterweight to the spread of National Socialism. The focal point of Mussolini's policy, however, had become Dollfuss himself.

Dollfuss—a politician who was anything but inexperienced, a true patriot and, certainly, one who has been unfairly maligned by historians, who have generally failed to realistically assess the dramatic circumstances in which he had to operate—had, prior to January 30, 1933, rebuffed Italian requests for a meeting with Mussolini and had sought to maintain a balance in Austrian policy between Rome and Paris, despite Starhemberg's pressure in favor of the former.

After Hitler came to power, however, the situation for his government and for Austria had become so difficult that, while not severing ties with Paris and London, he could no longer resist Italian overtures.

In Austria, National Socialism was making significant gains and receiving all possible support from Germany. As for Hitler, he regarded Dollfuss as an enemy of the Anschluss and his government as a monstrosity to be eliminated as soon as possible; he sought to ensure that new elections would be held in Austria shortly and that a national front would be formed to pave the way for an "alignment" of the Austrian domestic regime with that of Germany and, possibly, to a "personal union" of the two governments in the person of the same chancellor (himself) or, at the very least, to a situation that would make the Anschluss inevitable and practically a foregone conclusion in the more or less near future.

In these circumstances, Dollfuss certainly could not overlook the Italian factor.

Apart from the fact that, among the great powers, Italy was the one most directly interested in defending Austrian independence, and that Dollfuss knew from Starhemberg (who had been received by Mussolini in Rome on February 15) that Rome was counting on him as the man best suited to confront the National Socialists and Hitler, Mussolini was the only man toward whom the "Führer" showed personal respect and whose friendship he truly valued, and, therefore, the one who was best positioned to negotiate the Austrian question with him from a relatively strong position.

Rome's perspective on the Austrian situation is well captured in a detailed "memo" drafted on March 27 by P. Cortese, a high-ranking official at Palazzo Chigi. It reads:

If I were to describe the Austrian political situation in figurative terms, I would say that the Hitlerites are on the offensive, the Socialists on the defensive, and the …….—supported by the Heimwehr movement—on the counteroffensive.

The National Socialists have made enormous strides and are attacking with unusual vigor in Austria, a

phenomenon that can be explained by Germanic inspiration and Hitler's triumph in the Reich.

Schoolchildren, who have not experienced the halcyon days of the Dual Monarchy, are thoroughly imbued with Nazism and Germanism. The petty bourgeoisie—which, especially in the capital, depends on the Jews, who in one way or another control almost the entire economic life of the city—considers the National Socialist Party to be the only one capable of freeing it from the state of subjugation in which it lives. No one is concerned about what will happen after the Anschluss. It matters little, as long as the "Judenwirtschaft"—which has devastated Vienna—comes to an end.

The Christian Socialists are incapable of doing so; they are the spiritual heirs of the Habsburgs, who have always protected the Jewish capitalists. Jews can only be driven out by force, and Catholics neither want nor know how to use it.

It is therefore solely out of self-interest that the private-sector workforce hopes for the success of Nazism in Austria. Antipathy toward the Reich—and particularly toward Prussianism—persists as in the past and has indeed intensified during the war; under current conditions, however, in the face of the hope for liberation from Jewish control, it takes a back seat.

The Socialists are defending themselves. They hate the Hitlerites and often clash with them.

They no longer speak of the "Anschluss," but have merely postponed it until better times. There is outcry against the government, but not too much, given that the Christian Social Party—which forms the government's base—is seen as tomorrow's ally against the Nazis.

The Christian Social Party has not evolved. Its Catholic upbringing and bureaucratic mindset prevent it from taking to the streets. By nature, it tends toward compromise.

After the meeting, relations between the leaders of the Heimwehren and the National Socialists deteriorated very rapidly; on March 9, E. Monreale reported to Rome that they were now to be considered "broken":

There is no doubt that if they persist on this path, the Christian Socialists are destined to be overwhelmed by the Hitlerites.

The only ones who could still save them are Dollfuss and the Heimwehren. But to achieve this, the former must make use of the latter as his own asset—not to exploit them, but to utilize them. The Chancellor must promote the Heimwehren so that they become the breeding ground for the Christian-Social Party.

The Heimwehren, in turn, must place themselves under the government's command and intensify their propaganda, adopting the struggle against Austro-Marxism as their watchword. It does not seem prudent to add the cause of Austrian independence to this, because there are many annexationists even within the Heimwehren themselves, and also because, for the time being, they are still too weak to provoke the National Socialists.

Added to this is the consideration that by assigning the Heimwehren, for the time being, the simple task of anti-Marxist struggle, Italy would refute the accusation of inconsistency leveled against it today—namely, that it opposes in Austria the very same Hitlerite movement that it has always favored in Germany. It would thus become clear that this is due not to inconsistency, but to the advantage of utilizing a national movement in Austria—one that has emerged from the combatant movement—rather than an imported one.

It is the Government of the Republic, however, that can and must seize every opportunity to reaffirm faith in the Austrian state ideal.

Having regained, at least in part, the old positions of 1929 and 1930 through propaganda and with the Chancellor's help—starting from the magnificent Tyrolean base—the Heimwehren will be able, at the appointed time and in full agreement with Dollfuss, to seize control of the City of Vienna, without which one cannot be master of Austria. Today, any kind of coup by the Heimwehren would certainly be premature. They would be disavowed by Dollfuss himself—as, indeed, was already evident during the recent gathering of the Heimwehren in Vienna. The Chancellor is, in fact, determined to act forcefully against the Socialists and the Nazis, without paying too much heed to the letter of the Constitution, provided they offer the necessary pretexts.

Faced with this reality, for Cortese, the "only practical course of action for anyone wishing to attempt a last-ditch effort to save Austrian independence" was to:

1. Support Dollfuss.

2. Support the Heimwehren in their efforts to regain those few lost positions, without which it is impossible to make any use of them.

3. Work to establish a sincere and comprehensive understanding between the Chancellor and Starhemberg.

4. Not to waste a single day in the effort to implement the preceding points.

Always bear in mind that every hour that passes today works to the advantage of the Nazis.

This was, in essence, the same course that Mussolini had already set out on and continued to follow throughout the period under consideration with a tenacity that, in some cases, must have seemed excessive even to some “career” diplomats—a tenacity that demonstrates the importance he attached to the Austrian question in general and to the need to keep the Germans away from the Brenner Pass in particular.

A course of action that—once again—clearly explains both why the Austrian question had very quickly become the main source of conflict with Hitler (who at first had deluded himself into thinking he could soften the Italian position on the matter by accepting the idea of the Four-Power Pact) and why Dollfuss had been unable to refuse Italy’s offers of assistance, even though—contrary to what might appear at first glance—he had tried in every way not to give his “obligatory” relations with Italy the exclusive character desired by Mussolini.

This applied both to France and its allies in the Little Entente (from whose influence Mussolini would have liked to free him) and to Hungary.

To gain a clear understanding of Mussolini’s policy toward Austria, another essential element must be added to what is stated in Cortese’s note: that concerning Italian-Hungarian relations and their harmonization with Italian-Austrian policy.

The idea of close economic cooperation (even extending to a full-fledged customs union) between Italy, Hungary, and Austria had been floated since early 1932, though it made no real progress due to

fears of predictable German reactions and concerns on the part of Austria and Hungary itself that this might worsen or strain relations with Paris and the Little Entente.

With the formation of the Dollfuss and Gombos governments, the worsening of the economic situation, and above all the rapid deterioration of the international situation, the idea was taken up again by the Italians and Hungarians in November 1932, when Gombos visited Rome. However, during the initial phase of the Austrian crisis following Hitler's rise to power (January–June 1933), no actual negotiations in this direction had taken place, even though the matter had been discussed both during Hungarian Foreign Minister De Kanya's visit to Rome (on March 17) and during Dollfuss's visit a month later.

The first meeting between Mussolini and Dollfuss had taken place on April 12. The chancellor's presence in Rome had been justified by the ongoing negotiations with the Holy See regarding the Austrian Concordat; however, it had coincided—not by chance—with the visits of Göring and von Papen and had immediately taken on a clear anti-Nazi significance, which had made the negotiations between the Germans and Italians even more acrimonious.

The account of the meeting written by Mussolini himself clearly captures the essential points of the conversation between the two politicians:

After the customary pleasantries, he spoke to me about the situation in Austria, about local and Germanic Nazism, about the Socialists who—today—are terrified of the Anschluss, about the Christian Socialists who have consolidated their ranks in recent weeks, and about Starhemberg, who is in perfect agreement with Dollfuss. Their program is simple and clear: Austria has its own distinct historical identity, its own role in the Danube basin, and wishes to remain independent, while maintaining with Germany those special relations that stem from a shared race and culture. I told him that I fully approve of Dollfuss's position and added that on this matter he can count on my friendship and Italy's support.

Relations with Hungary are excellent. The economic situation has not worsened.

Dollfuss also spoke to me about his plans for constitutional reform, which I generally approve of. He told me that the mood in Vienna toward him is favorable, and I told him that this mood will improve the more energetic and consistent he is. Finally, Dollfuss—while making it clear that he has absolutely no desire to interfere in our domestic politics, but also prompted by his memories of Bolzano, where he had served in the military—asks me to accommodate Austrian wishes regarding "privatunterricht" in the province of Bolzano. I simply replied that I would keep in mind what he had said and that when I pursue a policy of friendship toward a state, I am also willing to demonstrate it.

Dollfuss—despite his diminutive stature—is a man of intellect, endowed with determination, and on the whole makes a good impression.

Despite his cordiality and the broad common ground in our views, however, the meeting had not, for the time being, had any real impact on Dollfuss's policy.

Concerned about not straining relations with France and Czechoslovakia, and mindful of the differing views that his authoritarian program provoked even within his own party, he had, in fact, for some time sought to avoid explicitly committing himself either to the struggle against social democracy or to a policy that was too openly pro-Italian.

However, when, in the second half of May, Hitler decided to take a hard line against him by implementing a series of financial and trade measures that threatened to stifle the Austrian economy and by inciting local National Socialists to wage a relentless struggle against his government, it became practically impossible for Dollfuss to persist with this course of action. It was at this point—on the eve of the signing of the Four-Power Pact—that Italian-Austrian relations had begun to move ever more rapidly toward a new phase, even though the chancellor sought to prevent them from resulting in a sort of exclusive Italian tutelage over Austria and, at first, to actively involve Paris and London in the defense of Austrian independence.

From June 2 to 6, Dollfuss was in Rome for the second time. Although we do not have the minutes of his talks with Mussolini, we know that the Duce encouraged him to act decisively against both the National Socialists and the Social Democrats (so as not to be accused of targeting only one side and of pursuing a policy that was not "patriotic") and also offered him Italy's military guarantee against any direct or indirect National Socialist attempt at Anschluss.

Dollfuss, however, did not wish to make any commitments at that time. From Rome, he traveled to London—where Daladier was also present—and tried to convince the British to initiate a joint Anglo-French-Italian initiative in Berlin to rein in Hitler.

From the Austrian perspective, the proposal was undoubtedly astute, but the British rejected it, anticipating that it would create difficulties with Rome and because the French preferred that Vienna refer its dispute with Germany to the League of Nations.

This solution, however, was considered unacceptable by the Italians. At this point, Dollfuss, having returned to Vienna, implemented the first of Mussolini's suggestions.

On June 19, he outlawed the National Socialists. Given the tense situation in the country and its increasingly serious repercussions on public order—which was constantly disrupted by incidents, attacks, incursions by terrorists, radio broadcasts, and the dropping of leaflets inciting armed insurrection by planes coming from Germany, etc.—the measure was certainly not unjustified. It was clear, however, that it could not help but exacerbate the situation and could only be a first step along the path suggested by Mussolini.

This was all the more true given that, during that very same period, the Hungarians—who had begun a process of rapprochement with Germany a few months earlier—had taken the initiative to mediate between Italy and Germany regarding Austria. Although the initial results had not been encouraging, this might, perhaps, have led to a reduction in German pressure on Austria, but, more likely, could also

pose risks for the Dollfuss government that were not easily assessed.

Nevertheless, for the Austrian chancellor to decide to proceed further along the path suggested to him by Rome, a new, forceful intervention by Mussolini was necessary, accompanied by an undisguised commitment regarding the Central European states, primarily Austria and Italy.

This intervention took the form of a long letter from the Duce to Dollfuss dated July 1, 1933. The letter opened with the reassurance that "whatever may happen, Italian aid will not be lacking."

This was followed by a few sentences expressing approval of the chancellor's idea to establish a patriotic front into which "the various parties fighting for Austria's national interest" were to be dissolved and for the collaboration that had been established between Dollfuss and the Heimwehren, as well as approval for the Austrian government's forceful response "against the criminal attacks that have recently been perpetrated in Austria and for which the National Socialists are responsible, even if it were to result in a state of siege."

Having made this introduction, Mussolini's letter went on to set forth several suggestions, which show beyond a shadow of a doubt how the Duce intended to resolve the Austrian question, both domestically and internationally.

Domestically, it was essential that Dollfuss transform Austria into a fascist state:

At the same time, I am of the opinion that, precisely because Your Excellency is compelled to take this urgent political action, it is becoming increasingly necessary under these circumstances to implement a program of effective and fundamental domestic reforms in a decidedly fascist vein. This seems to me to be the first measure to be taken, both to prevent the claim that Austria is pursuing a policy of suppression directed solely against a movement that, for better or worse, cloaks itself in the national flag, and to attract the youth—on whom the Patriotic Front must rely unreservedly—with the splendor of an idea capable of offering prospects for Austria's future… I am not unaware of the practical considerations that have so far led Your Excellency to refrain from taking a firm stance against the Social Democratic Party, a course of action that forms part of your program for Austria's internal reconstruction.

However, I believe that parliamentary concerns are now of secondary importance. Indeed, with regard to the planned constitutional reform, I believe that the Social Democratic Party—in light of the greater danger posed by Nazism and in the interest of restoring normal political life in Austria as soon as possible—will be compelled, as always, to follow the course set by Your Excellency. If, on the other hand, the Social Democratic Party is treated with consideration, I believe there is a far greater and more concrete danger that, as a result, the anti-Marxist weapon will fall into the hands of the Nazis and that they, at some point, may come to be seen as the saviors.

Whether this most feared weapon can be neutralized in their hands—and whether Nazism in Austria can thus be eradicated—depends on Your Excellency. I am convinced that as soon as you appeal to all

the sound national forces in Austria and strike at the Social Democrats in their stronghold, Vienna, and extend the purge to all centers and oppose the subversive tendencies against the authoritarian principles of the state, then many of those who are active today in the ranks of Nazism will join the ranks of the National Front.

Following this discussion of the internal situation in Austria (which, for Mussolini, could have had much broader implications in the long run, given that if, by doing so, Austria had preserved its independence and crushed local National Socialism, the Fascist solution would undoubtedly have gained new appeal for other countries, which might have seen their own political alignment with Italy as a sort of insurance against Germany and National Socialism), the letter turned to international issues and, in particular, to relations with Hungary.

“It seems to me,” Mussolini wrote in no uncertain terms, “that the most urgent matter is a closer agreement between Austria and Hungary…”:

This has nothing to do with laying the groundwork for a personal union between Austria and Hungary or with the restoration of the Habsburgs, as certain sections of the press are fancifully reporting these days, attributing the origin of such ideas to Italian policy. Italy refuses to accept such a solution because it considers it harmful to both countries and to the general interest of Europe.

The policy of close cooperation between Austria and Hungary—in both political and economic matters—must begin, from the Italian perspective, with a formal agreement between the two countries to pursue a common policy.

In my view, this agreement is the necessary prerequisite for other interesting and highly promising developments. Under Italy’s auspices and with its active assistance, such an agreement would enable both countries to enter into negotiations with neighboring countries without being subjected to excessive economic pressure and without appearing, as a result, to be subordinate to other, stronger countries.

This will subsequently facilitate the creation of a system of treaties with the countries of the Little Entente, on the one hand, and with Germany, on the other, since Austria and Hungary, thanks to their close ties with Italy, will avoid the danger of overt or covert absorption. I would like to see progress made very quickly along this path, but I do not wish to take any initiative until there is absolute and complete agreement between our two governments and Hungary. At that point, we will have to consider—and at that moment I intend to take the lead myself—how to create a favorable atmosphere among the other states interested in this initiative and also in relation to the broader developments I

mentioned earlier.

At the same time as this letter, Mussolini also wrote another one to Gombos. Since the Duce had mentioned it to Dollfuss, the latter took this as an opportunity to delay his reply as long as possible, using the excuse that he wanted to wait for the Hungarian Prime Minister to contact him.

In the end, however, on July 22, he had to resign himself to replying. The tone of his letter clearly suggests that Dollfuss would in fact have preferred to proceed along the path indicated by Mussolini without haste and with less drastic measures, so as not to tie his own hands too tightly; indeed, he would have welcomed the possibility of keeping the door open to France and England and keeping the Italian card in reserve as a last resort; and equally evident is his reluctance toward an overly rigid agreement with Budapest (which would inevitably have led to a deterioration of his relations with the Little Entente), especially if it had entailed—as was the Hungarian intention and as he could not rule out being the Italian one as well—Germany's participation in the arrangement, unless relations between Vienna and Berlin had first been absolutely clarified.

On the subject of domestic policy, he therefore agreed "that the Austrian federal government must not tolerate for a single moment the suspension of any activity aimed at establishing firm public authority" and was ready to assure Mussolini that he was "working to give these ideas a constructive form" and that, moreover, "the creation of a strong authoritarian regime" had been his intention since the previous year.

To this end, he had already tasked former Chancellor Ender with studying and implementing a constitutional reform and was working to establish its corporatist foundations. And here too—it should be noted—he emphasized that he had been a staunch advocate of the corporatist idea for many years, thereby implying—or at least attempting to imply—that what he was about to do, he would do not only and not so much because it had been suggested to him by Mussolini, but because it had long been in line with his own ideas and intentions.

The letter, however, became more evasive when it came to addressing social democracy. In essence, Dollfuss was still reluctant to take drastic measures against it, so that his letter, rather than accepting Mussolini's suggestion, went at length to explain how the implementation of his constitutional reform plans would inevitably lead to the disintegration of social democracy, while the formation of the patriotic front would result in its marginalization.

Finally, regarding relations with Hungary, Dollfuss was even more explicit. He was a staunch advocate of "the closest possible cooperation between Austria and Hungary in the economic sphere" and believed that "a common line of conduct on most foreign policy issues" would arise from close and continuous exchanges of views between the two countries; he wished to make it clear, however, in order to avoid misunderstandings, that naturally certain immediate problems facing the two countries, Austria and Hungary, are currently outside the scope of the discussion that makes a common policy in Vienna and Budapest possible—for example, the problem of Soviet Russia, the question of revising the terms of the peace treaties, and, unfortunately, also the question of current relations with National Socialist Germany.

Here I might add, in parentheses, that Austria, too, has the utmost interest in maintaining friendly relations with Germany, but, of course, on the condition that it has the assurance that the independence of Austria and its government institutions is guaranteed and respected without reservation by the government of the German Reich. Before the situation can be clarified, this respect must be demonstrated by showing that the Reich government and the leadership of the NSDAP—which is synonymous with that government—are committed to implementing the decision to regard and treat the National Socialist movement in Austria as an Austrian movement, linked to the Germans at most by ties of sympathy, and to finally take a clear-cut stance against promoting or tolerating any propaganda directed against Austria or any interference in Austria's internal affairs.

Three days after Dollfuss had written this letter to him, Mussolini was scheduled to receive Gombos and De Kanya in Rome. It is therefore not difficult to imagine the disappointment with which he must have read it, especially considering that—in a last-ditch attempt not to become too closely tied to Rome—on July 24, Dollfuss took an initiative that was anything but welcome at Palazzo Chigi: Taking his cue from the National Socialists' organization of an Austrian Legion ready to cross the border into Austria at the first opportunity, he revived the idea he had hinted at to the British the previous month and, without notifying Rome in advance, sent to England, France, and Italy three similar notes urging the three governments to call on Berlin to respect the Treaty of Versailles and to demand assurances that it would immediately cease any action in violation of it.

The Austrian trap was skillfully avoided by Rome, which—acting more swiftly than London and Paris—took independent action toward Berlin, obtaining general assurances regarding certain specific aspects of the Austro-German conflict (which Berlin, by contrast, did not provide to the British and French), made public by the Stefani News Agency, with the result:

a) distinguishing the Italian position from the Anglo-French one;

b) to make the Italian intervention appear to be the only effective one;

c) to let the world know that Hitler had yielded to Mussolini.

Despite its outcome, the episode is indicative of the efforts Dollfuss was still making to avoid being perceived by the world as a sort of satellite of Italy.

The talks between Mussolini and Gombos (July 25–28) took place in an atmosphere that was anything but relaxed. The Hungarians wanted above all to maintain good relations with both Germany and Italy and, to this end, sought to obtain from Mussolini a more flexible stance on the Austrian question; furthermore, they—especially after the USSR's rapprochement with the Little Entente—were absolutely opposed to any French initiative in the Danube region, since this would inevitably hinder their revisionist aspirations at the expense of the Little Entente, and they viewed with suspicion the news, conveyed to them by the Duce, of an impending Italian-Soviet friendship treaty. Mussolini, for his part, while on the one hand did not want to weaken relations with Budapest (which would have benefited Germany above all) and, indeed, wanted to make it the basis for a broader Italian-Austro-

Hungarian agreement, on the other hand, he could not ignore Dollfuss's position and did not want to preclude the possibility of acting to some extent in concert with France "on the Danube" and of neutralizing the ongoing rapprochement between Moscow and Paris—especially if, in doing so, he could also put Hitler in a difficult position.

In the end, however, a basis for agreement was found. The final document signed by Mussolini and Gombos consisted of five points:

a) "an ever closer rapprochement between Austria and Hungary, but no personal union between the two countries and no Habsburg restoration";

b) the parties' willingness to establish a three-way customs union among Italy, Austria, and Hungary, and, failing that, to "further strengthen their economic relations";

c) a policy of friendship with Germany—"all the easier if a 'thaw' were to occur between Germany and Austria"—and recognition of the common interest in a return to normal relations between these two countries, "of course with respect for and safeguarding of the independence of the Austrian state and with an effective renunciation on the part of Germany of any intervention in Austrian domestic politics";

d) agreement to reject the plans of the Little Entente for economic cooperation limited to the five Danube states;

e) reaffirmation—within the framework of the Four-Power Pact—of Hungary's direct interest in the "still unresolved issue of disarmament" and, "at a later stage," in the revision of the treaties, "a revision which—as far as Hungary is concerned in particular—remains one of the fundamental guiding principles of Italian foreign policy."

It would be an exaggeration to say that Mussolini viewed his conversations with Gombos and De Kanya as a success.

Regardless of the cost of the economic concessions Italy had made to soften the Hungarians' stance, these concessions had, in fact, confirmed the fundamental ambiguity of their attitude—and in particular, the Hungarians' desire to remain uninvolved in the Italian-German conflict and to oppose any rapprochement or détente in the Danube-Balkan region with the Little Entente and France.

Nevertheless, the meetings in Rome with the Hungarians had also shown that Budapest could not do without Italy and that, therefore, it would not refuse to follow Mussolini toward a three-way agreement with Austria, even though it would certainly try to drag out the negotiations and do everything possible to make them as politically non-binding and non-exclusive as possible.

This prospect was certainly far from ideal, but in the situation at the time—in which what mattered to Mussolini was to strengthen Dollfuss by any means necessary and to defend his sphere of influence and economic penetration along the Danube against ever-increasing German pressure, without at the same time precluding the possibility of finding, if necessary, a modus vivendi between his own system in those regions and the French one, was nonetheless, just as certainly, sufficient to allow him to proceed further—that is, to set in motion the negotiations necessary to bring Vienna into line with the agreements in principle reached with the Hungarians and to move toward their concrete implementation.

Hence the need for a new meeting with Dollfuss that would help him overcome his uncertainties and reluctance to fully accept the requests Mussolini had been making of him since April.

The third meeting between Mussolini and Dollfuss took place in Riccione on August 19–20. An Italian memo outlining the issues to be raised with Dollfuss and some of his own notes on the talks themselves allow us to form a fairly precise picture of how it unfolded.

For Mussolini, it was essential that the chancellor immediately proceed with the complete fascistization of his regime and that, as soon as he returned to Vienna, he announce his intentions and proceed to strengthen his government by including several leaders of the Heimwehren, among them Starhemberg (who, evidently in the Duce's intentions, were supposed to keep him in check and prevent him from dragging things out any longer).

As for foreign policy, the Italian memo states:

a) A declaration of friendship toward all neighboring nations, including Germany, and an affirmation of the historic and inalienable functions of an independent Austria.

b) Recognition of the special relations with Hungary and Italy.

c) The possibility and necessity of cooperation with the Little Entente on economic matters.

d) Announcement of the possibility of a tripartite conference (Italy-Austria-Hungary) to strengthen the ties between the three states in all spheres.

Dollfuss responded to these requests in his usual manner, seeking to avoid too rigid a commitment: he pledged to accelerate the fascistization of the Austrian regime, but avoided committing to a government reshuffle and remained vague on foreign policy issues, insisting on a preliminary improvement in Italian-Austrian economic relations.

That the Riccione talks were not truly conclusive is demonstrated, moreover, by the fact that on September 9, Mussolini felt the need to write a new letter to Dollfuss in which—citing the gravity of the Austrian situation and the danger of a National Socialist coup, and citing Starhemberg's opinion in support of this—he urged him to adopt a more decisive and passionate tone in Austria's policy of renewal.

Having said this to put the Mussolini–Dollfuss relationship in its proper perspective, it must also be noted that, in any case, after the Riccione talks, the Austrian chancellor finally began to move in the direction desired by Mussolini. On September 11, during a mass rally at the Vienna racetrack, he announced his intention to establish a "Christian-Social German State of Austria based on corporatism" and launched a fierce attack against the National Socialists and the Social Democrats; a few days later, he reshuffled his government, promoting one of the leaders of the Heimwehren, Major Fey, to the position of vice chancellor.

Two days later, on September 14, he in turn wrote to Mussolini, pointing out that he had followed his "good advice," that the government reshuffle constituted "a further step in the implementation of the program" outlined in Riccione, and adding that he hoped to be able to "carry out the necessary and fundamental reforms" announced in his speech in the near future.

For the time being, however, no major action was taken against the Social Democrats.

And for Dollfuss to take such action, Mussolini had to wait until February 12, 1934.

Between September and February, however, progress had been made on the foreign policy front.

Between January 18 and 20, Suvich had been in Vienna; in the first ten days of the following month, Dollfuss had traveled to Budapest, where Suvich also went about fifteen days later. In the course of these three-way contacts, the Italian-Austro-Hungarian agreement had begun to slowly take shape, even though Dollfuss had continued to hope to limit its consequences for his country, and the Hungarians, for their part, had sought to restore the balance by letting Berlin know that their friendship with Germany remained unchanged and that, ultimately, they were convinced that the "alignment" of the Austrian regime with the German one was "a natural necessity that, overcoming all resistance, would prevail."

Thus, in March, Mussolini was finally able to consider the time ripe to give the planned agreement its first official endorsement.

P. Aloisi's diary is extremely useful for assessing the international atmosphere in which the Italian-Austro-Hungarian agreements of Rome were concluded and their actual significance. An entry dated March 12 captures the former well: "We are benefiting from a favorable international atmosphere for this meeting in Rome: the Little Entente is less hostile, France is drawing closer, and England approves. There is hostility from Germany, however."

As for their actual significance, Aloisi's notes clearly reveal that the three protocols signed "after a thousand prevarications and amendments" on the evening of March 17 (two involving all three countries, one limited solely to certain Italian-Austrian economic issues) were the result of a general compromise and, more importantly, that each of the three signatories attributed a different value and perspective to them.

For Dollfuss, they were a necessity that, had he been able, he would have gladly avoided—and he likely understood just how fraught with danger they were for his country.

For the Hungarians (regarding whom Aloisi noted on March 13: "This country is beginning to become a real burden on our foreign policy"), they were a means of bolstering their economic demands and of not losing Italy's friendship; but they made no secret of the fact that they would never act against

Germany, both because “against Czechoslovakia we need Germany’s active friendship” and because “Hungary feels called upon to pursue its own policy in the Danube Valley, relying on Italy south of the Danube and on Germany north of the Danube,” and that, therefore, their preferences (and thus their prospects for developing the agreements themselves) were—subject to Austrian independence—for a political and economic agreement between Berlin, Rome, Vienna, and Budapest, so that they hoped for an improvement in relations with Germany.

Furthermore, the Hungarians viewed the ongoing rapprochement between Rome and Paris with little sympathy and would not accept any agreement with Yugoslavia unless it first accepted the principle of treaty revision. Meanwhile, for Mussolini—who was increasingly concerned about the situation in Austria and the pressure toward the south being exerted at all levels by Germany—the Rome Protocols were intended to have an essentially anti-German character and were to be developed toward their extension to Yugoslavia and a revision, with the agreement between Italy and France, of the influence of these two countries in the Danube-Balkan region, primarily at the expense of German aspirations.

For Mussolini, this did not mean renouncing the revisionist principle, but certainly reducing it to very little (at least in relation to Hungarian aspirations) and phasing it in gradually over time.

Thus, it is easy to understand why, in the protocols signed by Mussolini, Dollfuss, and Gombos, the political commitments did not go beyond the affirmation of a shared desire “to contribute to the maintenance of peace and economic restoration in Europe, based on respect for the independence and rights of every state” and the commitment “to consult on all issues of particular interest to them and on those of a general nature, with the aim of pursuing, in the spirit of the existing treaties of friendship among them, a concerted policy designed to promote effective collaboration among European states—and particularly among Italy, Austria, and Hungary—convinced that in this way it would be possible to establish the real foundations for broader cooperation with other states.”

It is also understandable why, in the economic sphere, they set aside—at least for the time being—the initial goal of a customs union and limited themselves to a series of specific agreements designed to facilitate their respective exports and develop the complementary nature of their respective economies.

What we have said, however, should not lead one to believe that Mussolini achieved no practical results through these agreements. On the contrary, Ránki was quite right when he wrote that:

despite this, the signing of the Tripartite Pact meant that Mussolini had succeeded in making his case, so that the Italian press could speak—and not without reason—of a great success for Italian foreign policy.

The Austrian question and, more generally, Mussolini’s policy aimed at containing Germany’s push toward the southeast had reached this point when, at the end of March, talk resumed of an upcoming meeting between Mussolini and Hitler.

The initiative to introduce the two men to one another personally and to attempt, through a direct

meeting between them, to break the deadlock and ease the tensions in Italian-German relations was primarily a personal initiative on the part of von Papen (in the sense that it is unclear whether the ambassador to Rome, von Hassell, was also involved).

The Vice Chancellor had met Mussolini the previous year and had been very favorably impressed by him. As he would write in his memoirs, he had found in him “a man of a very different stature from that of Hitler”:

Short in stature but with an air of great authority, his massive head gave the impression of remarkable strength of character. He treated people like a man accustomed to having his orders obeyed, yet he exuded immense charm and did not give the impression of a revolutionary. Hitler always had a slight air of uncertainty, as if he were searching for his path, while Mussolini was calm, dignified, and proved to be completely in command of whatever topic came up for discussion. I felt he would have a positive influence on Hitler; he possessed far more of the statesman’s qualities and reminded me more of an old-school diplomat than of a dictator. He spoke French and German excellently, which greatly facilitated the exchange of ideas.

In the second half of March, he was in Italy to spend the Easter holidays there. On March 28, at the Opera, he met with the Duce, with whom he had a brief exchange of ideas that the two continued in greater depth in the following days. We have three accounts of these conversations.

According to von Papen:

I had reserved a box at the Opera for that evening and was surprised to find Mussolini in the box next to mine. Hassell had informed him of my incognito visit during the intermission, and after the performance, I had a long discussion with the Duce, who was very concerned about the Nazis’ behavior in Austria and the direction things were taking in Germany. I told him about our efforts to rein in the extremists and about my concern over the deterioration of our international relations. I asked the Duce if he would be willing to invite Hitler on an official visit in order to try to get him to change his ways and convince him of the need for a peaceful foreign policy. I knew that Hitler had great admiration for Mussolini’s character and for the achievements he had made, and I hoped that the Duce might be able to exert effective pressure on him. Mussolini wholeheartedly agreed to my suggestion and asked me to convey an official invitation to Hitler.

Given von Papen’s particular stance toward National Socialism (in more ways than one similar to that of many Italian sympathizers toward Fascism), it cannot be ruled out that he made the aforementioned remarks to Mussolini.

Moreover, the report sent by Ambassador von Hassell (who immediately became a staunch supporter of the idea of the meeting) to Berlin on April 3 indicates that the discussion between the two politicians went much further. And this explains why von Papen, writing after World War II, chose to remain silent about this second part.

The Vice Chancellor, in fact, discussed with Mussolini the entire complex of Italian-German relations and became an advocate not only—and not so much—for the need to clarify them, but for setting them on a new course. In particular, he emphasized the priority of economic issues over those of armaments, arguing that the agreements Italy had signed with Austria and Hungary (regarding which he made no secret of the suspicion with which they were viewed in Berlin) would remain unfulfilled unless Germany also participated in them and that, more generally, Italy's expansionist policy could not be carried out in agreement with France but only with Germany, so Mussolini had to decide whose side to take and not play the French card one moment and the German card the next.

Hence his proposal for a Mussolini-Hitler meeting, which it is unclear to what extent the Duce accepted willingly, given that the third source at our disposal—P. Aloisi's diary—shows that he gave his consent to it only during the third meeting with von Papen on March 30, and von Hassell's report indicates that, on the one hand, he was careful to frame it immediately not from the perspective, "interesting but of little use," of an examination of the similarities and differences between the two regimes, but rather as a comparison of their respective viewpoints on concrete European political issues; on the other hand, he told von Papen that he would send Suvich to London to inform the British; and, furthermore, he preferred not to give it too official a character—that of a state visit— but rather that of a personal meeting (hence the choice of Venice), so they could get to know one another directly.

As is easily seen—and as was immediately realized in Berlin (hence some initial uncertainty about whether to follow through on von Papen's initiative)—what interested Mussolini most of all was the Austrian question (to which three of the four points on the draft agenda ultimately referred); in essence, he was less interested in the issue of German rearmament (or, as it was euphemistically called, disarmament), which he by then considered a foregone conclusion, given that, from his point of view, Italy's stance on this depended largely on how the Austrian question would be resolved.

In Berlin, however, the order of priorities was completely reversed, as they were counting on Italy to initiate a different line of discussion with England and isolate France. On the Austrian question, both the Wilhelmstrasse and Hitler himself had by then become convinced that—if an agreement with Mussolini was desired—it was necessary, for the time being, to compromise, and they would have been willing to do so immediately had it not been for the fear that, in doing so, they would face an Italian demand to collaborate in supporting the Austrian economy—which, of course, could not be accepted because it would have strengthened Dollfuss and, in the long run, made the Anschluss more difficult; they were well aware, however, that only by making concessions could they attempt to prevent Italy from continuing to move progressively closer to France.

There was no doubt that Italy, despite claiming to pursue a policy of neutrality, was drawing closer to Paris. Aside from the Austrian question and the related Anglo-French-Italian declaration in support of Austria's independence on February 17, 1934, Italy's entire stance over the past nine to ten months demonstrated this. This was demonstrated by Rome's evasiveness on a series of issues of concern to Berlin, which Palazzo Chigi had postponed under various pretexts; it was demonstrated by Italy's alignment with French positions at the London Economic Conference; it was demonstrated above all by the fact that, upon the resumption—following the conclusion of the Four-Power Pact—of the

Disarmament Conference, Italy had accepted most of the new proposals agreed upon between France and England (thereby even accepting the potential quantitative superiority of the French armed forces over the Italian ones) and had in fact shown solidarity with London and Paris in denying Germany the possibility of rearming, to the point that—despite having formally presented a series of technical proposals aimed at supporting Germany's partial and gradual parity—at the decisive moment, on October 14, 1933, it found itself standing alongside them, resulting in Germany's complete isolation, which had led Hitler to abandon the conference and the League of Nations itself.

This was an act that Mussolini had not anticipated; it did not fit into his plans and annoyed him in various respects, not least ideologically, since it marked a clear break between Fascist revisionism and anti-societarianism—which were essentially rhetorical—and Hitler's, which were concrete and devoid of tactical maneuvering.

So much so that when Hitler, in an attempt to appease him, sent Göring to Rome on November 6 with a personal message for the Duce—one that was quite moderate in tone, extremely skillful and charming in form, and conciliatory in substance—the maneuver yielded no practical results. Nor could Berlin harbor any illusions about the fact that Rome had subsequently, on the issue of disarmament, once again distinguished its position from those of London and, above all, Paris, thereby formally restoring its neutral stance.

Apart from tactical considerations—typical of Mussolini's modus operandi—the new Italian position was in fact well explained by the widespread sense of mistrust and the desire for a certain degree of disengagement that the crisis of October 1933 had aroused in various countries, such as the United States and England, as well as by Rome's interest in supporting London's flexible policy rather than Paris's rigid one.

Nor, finally, could Berlin underestimate the significance of Italy's rapprochement with the USSR or ignore the outbursts against its policy to which the Duce occasionally gave in (whether sincerely or deliberately is of little consequence) during his talks with foreign diplomats, nor the warnings he sometimes sent indirectly (primarily through the Hungarians).

And this is without mentioning the utter ineffectiveness of the assurances that Hitler had personally given to Suvich—who had traveled to Berlin in early December—that the Anschluss was not urgent for Germany and that, in any case, the Austrian question had to be resolved by mutual agreement and must not ruin Italian-German relations.

In this situation, it is easy to understand how, in the weeks leading up to the Mussolini-Hitler meeting, efforts were made in both Rome and Berlin to steer matters in the direction most important to each side and to gauge their respective positions.

On the German side, perhaps the most significant step was Ribbentrop's visit to Rome in mid-May to present to Mussolini the German viewpoint on the issue of disarmament and to gauge his stance on the matter, to ascertain Mussolini's position on certain specific issues, and to understand how much weight should be given to certain statements made by the Italian press.

To gain insight into the mood in German circles, especially in the days immediately preceding the meeting, Renzetti's reports (sometimes daily) from Berlin are particularly interesting. They clearly show that no one failed to recognize the importance the meeting could have for the subsequent development of relations between the two countries.

A typical example is what Renzetti reported on June 13, just as Hitler was preparing to leave for Italy:

Hitler's meeting with the Duce—which has been the subject of discussion for quite some time within well-informed political circles—has pushed other domestic and foreign policy issues into the background.

No one here is unaware of the enormous historical and political significance of this event, from which many expect favorable consequences, even as they realize the difficulties that must be overcome.

As I have already said, Hitler is very pleased with the meeting—and, in my humble opinion, genuinely pleased. For not only will he finally meet the Duce, whom he deeply admires, but he will also be able to discuss with the Duce himself those issues that he perhaps does not even discuss with his closest associates (I have observed that on several occasions Hitler told me things he had not even confided to his comrades) and that keep him in a state of agitation (for example, before deciding to withdraw from the League of Nations, Hitler went almost three days and three nights without sleep, resting only to weigh the pros and cons).

Hitler naturally hopes to achieve positive results for his own country. But deep down, I believe he is pleased with the meeting, partly because he hopes it will serve the revolutionary cause. Not to mention the satisfaction he feels at seeing all the rumors debunked—namely, that the Duce never wanted to meet with Hitler because he held him in no esteem.

It is my personal impression that Hitler will be captivated by the Duce's charisma and power: that Hitler wishes to achieve an Italian-German understanding. The Chancellor is acutely aware of the European problem and that of the white race: Italian-German solidarity and Fascist-Nazi solidarity could lead to joint action aimed at spreading Fascism to other nations, ultimately resulting in a grand alliance among the various Fascist countries. (It is telling in this regard that German newspapers, when reporting on revolutionary movements in other countries, refer to "fascist" groups and movements—a fact that suggests that, deep down, they recognize the priority, superiority, and expansive power of our ideology.) Hitler, as he has told me on several occasions—including very recently—is willing to make economic concessions to those countries with which Germany maintains cordial relations.

In my opinion, however, should an understanding be reached, the practical consequences of that understanding would need to be implemented immediately, without allowing German officials—who rely on paragraphs and more or less accurate statistics (statistics are either accurate or lies, as someone once said!)—to take the upper hand and cause delays, etc. Hitler, I believe, is fully intent on achieving

practical results: in this way, he would see part of his program—which includes an agreement with Italy—come to fruition. The Chancellor now suspects that we have territorial ambitions beyond the Alps. For my part, and I believe not without success, I have maintained that Italy has no such intentions. Reassured on this point, I believe the Chancellor might be persuaded to grant at least part of what is being requested of him. If détente were achieved, Hitler could set about with greater composure the task of resolving the many domestic and foreign problems. The agreement would silence the not insignificant number of opponents who have criticized—and continue to criticize—the foreign policy pursued thus far: it could make a modus vivendi with the Vatican possible (I have been told in confidence by certain figures—whom I could name—that von Neurath is unhappy with the current policy, that von Papen is fed up, etc.); in short, the agreement could bring about a much-desired internal détente (regardless of the advantages on the international stage) that would be infinitely useful to the Nazi regime and the German nation.

On the Italian side, during this same period, the focus was essentially on clarifying two points. The first concerned Austria. A typical example is the telegram in which, on June 1, Rome informed the ambassador in Berlin of the conclusion of the preliminary talks and the setting of the date for the meeting:

According to agreements reached through this Ambassador to Germany, the aforementioned meeting is to take place on the 14th of this month in Venice.

Meanwhile, the resurgence of Nazi terrorism in Austria—which is clearly directed and fueled from across the border, with new incidents reported daily—shows no sign of abating. This certainly does not help create an atmosphere more conducive to the meeting.

I ask Your Excellency to bring this matter to their attention in an appropriate manner.

And even in his conversation with von Hassell, Mussolini was explicit on this point: if the meeting was to be constructive, it had to be, above all, frank; therefore, it was absurd to think of avoiding discussion of the Austrian issue, given that it was interconnected with and inseparable from the other issues and was the only one on which Italy and Germany were in conflict.

Italy wanted Austria’s independence, but it was also aware that, once an agreement to that effect had been reached, Austria should not pursue an anti-German policy; it was up to the National Socialists to make the agreement possible by ceasing to act against Dollfuss. The second point on which Mussolini

insisted most strongly, both diplomatically and in certain public statements, was that of disarmament.

On closer inspection, however, these statements—especially the public ones—were directed less at the Germans than at international public opinion in general, and at London and Paris in particular. They were intended to elicit some support for his proposals aimed at reconciling the opposing positions and, at the same time, to test Hitler's good faith (who presented his demands as a matter of principle and morality, and assured that he had neither the intention nor the means to arm more than three hundred thousand men) and to try to tie his hands as much as possible for a few years.

In this regard, the article "Toward Rearmament," which he published in *Popolo d'Italia* on May 18, 1934, immediately after Ribbentrop's visit, is highly significant.

In it, after summarizing the status of the disarmament negotiations and outlining the various points of view, he stated:

Given how things have turned out… there are no alternatives: either the Italian plan is accepted, or the arms race begins anew. The advantages of the Italian plan are as follows: it does not require any disarmament on the part of the currently armed powers; …

France thus retains its superiority in terms of military potential. This, above and beyond any protocol, constitutes the true foundation of all security.

But while the French accept the first part of the Italian memorandum, they reject the second part, the one that accommodates German demands. It is true that the Italian memorandum proposes accepting German demands without endlessly quibbling over them, but it is equally true that accepting these demands comes with a considerable quid pro quo, which consists of:

a) the transformation of the Reichswehr from a professional army into a regular army with short-term enlistment;

b) Hitler's acceptance of oversight even over paramilitary units;

c) Germany's return to the League of Nations…

Under the Italian proposal, the agreement would have a duration of between a minimum of six years and a maximum of ten. Now that the fundamental outlines of the Italian proposal have been set forth, one can foresee what situation will arise if the disarmament conference must, in the end, officially declare its failure. The armed nations will not only maintain their current level of armaments but will increase it, and Germany will do the same: that is, Germany, free from any treaty constraints, will organize and expand its forces and its war preparations. Is there anyone who will want to prevent this? I do not believe so. In any case, there is only one means: resorting to that “preemptive” war which may have flashed through the minds of certain circles as a possibility, but which the French people cannot view favorably. Let the experience of the Ruhr serve as a lesson….

Since these were the atmosphere and the main moves made by both sides during the preparatory phase, let us now turn to the meeting.

It took place on June 14 in Stra, at the Villa Pisani, and continued the following day in Venice, at the Lido. No minutes were taken by either the Italian or German side, given the personal nature intended for the talks that the two politicians held tête-à-tête and during the various ceremonies and receptions that accompanied them.

Since Hitler spoke only German and the presence of an interpreter was not deemed appropriate, the conversations took place in German, a language that—contrary to what is often claimed—Mussolini knew quite well, even if he spoke with some slowness.

To reconstruct the content of these conversations, it is therefore necessary to refer to what Hitler and Mussolini reported to their associates and to the few other details that leaked out at the time or subsequently.

Nevertheless, their substance can be reconstructed with a high degree of accuracy and beyond a shadow of a doubt as regards their concrete significance with respect to both relations between the two countries and those between the two dictators.

The first meeting, lasting over two hours, was devoted almost entirely to Austria and was “very eventful.” Hitler tried to shift all the blame onto Dollfuss, but in the end he proved willing to reach an agreement and undertook to set forth in writing the following day five points that could serve as the basis for it. Namely:

1) Germany had no interest in the Anschluss, because the issue was not pressing and was not internationally feasible;

2) the replacement of Dollfuss with a man not affiliated with any party;

3) new elections as soon as possible;

4) the inclusion of the National Socialists in the government formed following those elections;

5) close Italian-German cooperation on all Austrian economic matters.

In addition, Hitler wanted Italy to withdraw its “protective hand” from Austria. According to German sources, Mussolini merely took note of these requests. According to Aloisi, each side remained firm in its position.

In this light, the cautious yet significant words spoken by Mussolini in St. Mark’s Square, Venice, after his second meeting with Hitler take on considerable significance:

Hitler and I met here not to redraw or even modify the political map of Europe and the world, nor to add further causes for concern to those that already trouble all nations from the Far East to the Far West. We met to try to dispel the clouds that obscure the horizon of European political life.

As for the other topics, discussed primarily during the second meeting, they ranged from disarmament and the League of Nations to French and Soviet policy, as well as the internal situation in Germany—with regard to National Socialism, the anti-Semitic campaign, and relations with the Church.

Overall, as Aloisi noted in his diary, “without significant results.”

On disarmament, Hitler remained firm in his previous positions. As for the League of Nations, he said he was not opposed to it but considered it useless and therefore wished to remain outside it. Mussolini, for his part, stated that he did not wish to take any further initiatives on disarmament and emphasized the failure of negotiations with France on the naval issue, informing Hitler of his decision to build two 35,000-metric-ton battleships.

He also mentioned his conviction that cooperation among the great powers was always necessary and spoke of extending the Four-Power Pact to Poland and, if possible, to the United States and Japan.

Even as an initial personal contact and overview of the situation, it cannot be said with certainty that the results were—even setting aside the Austrian question, which, as was repeatedly stated, was not supposed to influence the other issues under discussion—encouraging, much less significant.

Leaving Austria aside, one gets the impression that rather than a genuine discussion and negotiation, it was more of a presentation of the respective points of view on certain issues.

As von Papen would write years later:

the two leaders spent much of their time speaking at each other rather than with each other. Hitler, in particular, indulged in an uninterrupted torrent of words that made any discussion impossible.

As for the more strictly personal, human aspect, their reactions must have been quite different; in practice, this first meeting yielded no other result in this regard than to confirm their previous assessments: Hitler's view of the Duce was extremely positive, while Mussolini's view of the "Führer" was essentially critical.

The Duce was struck above all by his interlocutor's lucid fanaticism. "An endless fury of logic, and an endless search for a body, for an original and ferocious bloodline, beyond reason," as he told his sister. And by his doctrinarism: "Instead of talking to me about current problems… he recited his *Mein Kampf* from memory."

Perhaps the most significant account of the impression Mussolini made on Hitler is the one preserved in one of Renzetti's customary reports, written immediately after the Chancellor's return to Berlin:

Today I attended an intimate breakfast with Hitler, whom I found beaming.

During the long conversation we had before breakfast, he told me he was enthusiastic about his meeting with the Duce. I, he continued, already knew and admired Mussolini through his speeches, his writings, and his deeds: I am happy that the meeting gave me the opportunity not only to confirm my opinion but also to expand upon it. Men like Mussolini are born once every thousand years, and Germany can be glad that he is Italian and not French.

I, naturally, found myself somewhat self-conscious (befangen) in the Duce's presence, but I am glad to have been able to speak at length, to have heard his ideas, and to have presented mine to him. "What a speaker Mussolini is!" he exclaimed. "And what power he wields over the people!" I observed the crowd, and as a connoisseur—which I believe myself to be—I noted that the Italians truly stand behind their great Leader.

During the conversation (Hitler struck me as sincere; he is not in the habit of offering formal compliments, at least not to me), the Chancellor seemed transformed. And this impression of mine was later confirmed by the descriptions I received yesterday and today—both from those accompanying him and from other political figures—as well as by the events in Venice and Hitler's own accounts.

The extent—or, if you prefer, the proof—of how little the Mussolini-Hitler meeting affected Italian-German relations, and of how it was interpreted on the Italian side as confirmation of the impossibility

of reaching an agreement with Berlin—since Italy was unwilling to accept the elimination of Dollfuss and, consequently, the Anschluss and the failure of the entire Fascist Danube policy, is strikingly demonstrated by the events of the weeks that immediately followed.

Even setting aside the crisis in relations between Hitler and von Papen and the profound impact that the tragic events of June 30 had in Italy as well—the political purge of the SA, the assassination of Rhöm and his principal collaborators, and, along with them, Gen. Schleicher and various other figures disliked by the regime—which, moreover, contributed significantly to increasing Mussolini's distrust of National Socialism and, at the same time, led him to wonder whether Hitler was actually capable of controlling the German situation in the long term; even setting all that aside, it is in fact extremely significant that the meeting not only failed to change anything in Mussolini's Austrian policy but, in a certain sense, radicalized it.

This is evidenced by the fact that—as the Germans immediately noted—Hitler's five points on Austria were regarded at Palazzo Chigi as little more than a point of view to be taken into account, and that Mussolini—who was meanwhile receiving increasingly alarming news from Vienna—informed von Hassell that he could not advise Dollfuss to begin negotiations with Berlin because no government could have agreed to negotiate under those conditions.

And this is proven above all by the fact that the Duce hastened to congratulate Dollfuss on the new crackdown he was imposing on Austrian political life at that very time and, more importantly for the purposes of our discussion, wished to personally advise Minister Fey on the most appropriate means to crush "Nazi terrorism."

On July 15, he in fact telegraphed the Italian representative in the Austrian capital:

Since Fey has taken the lead in the fight against Nazi terrorism and since I believe him to be a man capable of leading it, I wish for you to convey to him—on my behalf—these considerations, also pointing out to him that they are the result of the Fascist regime's own experience, when it succeeded in crushing, between 1928 and 1930, every attempt at terrorism by exiles and the Black Hand.

1) It is necessary for the Austrian government to refrain from issuing further ordinances, as their frequency now bears too close a resemblance to the Spanish "cries" of Manzonian memory;

2) Instead, existing ordinances must be enforced, and the judiciary and police must be purged;

3) The border with Germany must be sealed off completely;

4) Use every means—whether propaganda or money—to shake the population out of its truly cowardly

passivity, a passivity that amounts to outright complicity: Conclusion: Act in silence, but act.

In this already precarious situation, on July 25, 1934, the Austrian National Socialists suddenly went on the offensive, launching a coup attempt aimed at overthrowing the Dollfuss government and bringing about the Anschluss. The coup, as is well known, was crushed by loyalist forces and failed within a very short time; during which, however, Chancellor Dollfuss was killed by a group of rioters who had stormed the Chancellery.

Even today, it is difficult to say with certainty whether Hitler was aware of the coup and had approved it or whether, on the contrary, he was unaware of it. He immediately proclaimed that he was completely uninvolved in it and explicitly condemned it.

The most likely hypothesis is that Hitler was indeed personally unaware of it and that it was not part of his plans. It is more difficult to rule out the possibility that certain elements—perhaps even some of significance—within the German National Socialist Party were involved in the coup. For while it is clear and understandable that the Austrian National Socialists, in their fierce hatred of Dollfuss and their unionist fanaticism, had decided to take action to force Hitler's hand—and that this decision was influenced by the conviction that the meeting between the Duce and the "Führer" had, for better or worse, for the time being, ruled out other possibilities for achieving the Anschluss, it is much less plausible to think that—given the extremely close ties between the two parties—this could have happened without the German National Socialists knowing anything about it.

Nor can it be ruled out—as some claimed and as Renzetti himself seemed inclined to believe—that, from the German side, the coup was, at least in part, linked to internal struggles within the NSDAP and to the upheaval caused by the massacre of June 30.

To understand and assess the Italian reactions to the coup, however, the question of individual responsibility is obviously secondary. In Rome, after an initial moment of confusion, most must have shared Aloisi's view, namely that "the German government, while not directly implicated in the assassination of Dollfuss, allowed itself to be duped by irresponsible elements it should have kept under control."

For both Palazzo Chigi and Mussolini (who, moreover, had a personal friendship with Dollfuss—a friendship reciprocated to the point that, upon his death, Dollfuss said he was entrusting his wife and children to Mussolini), what ultimately mattered was that the events of July 25 demonstrated the impossibility of trusting Hitler's assurances that the Anschluss was no longer on the table and, therefore, the need for Italy to guard against a repeat of the attempt, without relying on Berlin and even against Berlin itself, given that it was by no means certain that, under different circumstances, Hitler would not adopt a stance favorable to the Austrian National Socialists.

From this perspective, it is easy to understand why Mussolini immediately framed Italy's response to the putsch in the harshest terms, fostered the conviction among national and international public opinion that Germany and Hitler were behind the Austrian National Socialists, and, on the diplomatic front, sought to win support for his uncompromising stance not only from the British and French but also from the Little Entente.

In every country, the coup met with unanimous condemnation from the press and public opinion. Perhaps nowhere, however, was this reaction as vehement as in Italy and, above all, as directed against Germany. This was true both immediately after the event and in the days that followed, even when Berlin—with the appointment of von Papen as extraordinary ambassador to Vienna—sought to reassure the world of its goodwill in implementing a new policy toward Austria.

Such a stance by the Italian press certainly reflected the sentiments of Italian public opinion; just as certainly, however, it was intended and encouraged by the Fascist government, which, had it not deemed it appropriate, had all the necessary means to prevent or moderate it. Moreover, it can be said that Mussolini himself had set the tone by making public the text of the telegram he had sent to the Austrian vice-chancellor as soon as he learned of Dollfuss's assassination. In it, in fact, the Duce touched upon, in a certain sense, all the points that characterized the Italian press's stance during those days: grief over the tragic death of a man of exceptional qualities, the assertion of Austrian independence as "a principle that has been defended and will be defended by Italy even more strenuously," and the moral condemnation of those "directly and indirectly" responsible for the coup.

This explains the coldness and harshness with which, on July 28, Suvich rejected Ambassador von Hassell's protests regarding the tone used against Germany by the Italian press and his explanations concerning the significance to be attributed to von Papen's appointment.

The most sensational act carried out by Mussolini, as soon as he received news of the events in Vienna, was, however, that (also made public, not by chance, through the press) of putting four divisions stationed in the region between the Brenner Pass and Tarvisio on alert and ordering some of their units to move closer to the border.

As Aloisi noted in his diary, these were certainly "very serious measures" and—we might add—while they were likely intended, in part, to reinforce in the public eye the image of a strong, uncompromising Fascism as the guardian of the national interests most deeply felt by Italians, they also entailed certain risks.

Once the first step had been taken, if the situation in Austria were to take another unexpected turn or if, at a later date, a new coup were to occur, Mussolini would in fact no longer have been able—unless he wanted to lose face—to refrain from acting accordingly.

And this, aside from the risks of a conflict (as early as July 25, upon the very first reports from Vienna, Aloisi had seen the specter of Sarajevo resurface) and of serious complications with Yugoslavia (which would view an Italian intervention with extreme hostility and would in turn likely seek to lay claim to Carinthia) and with Austria itself (where an Italian intervention would most likely have reawakened old grudges and, more importantly, the never-dormant feelings of belonging to the greater German community)—it would not have been welcomed by anyone, especially the French, for whom a unilateral Italian intervention would have created enormous embarrassment and, in the worst case, might have been even more unwelcome than a German intervention (which would have been easier to counter politically and, if necessary, militarily as well); so Mussolini would have found himself in a very difficult situation.

This was well understood in Rome. For the Duce, however, the opportunity was too valuable to let slip by simply to avoid taking risks, especially since at that moment the putsch seemed to have failed and Hitler did not appear willing to take actions that would further aggravate the situation. This was all the

more true given that recent events in Austria had shown that, despite all of Dollfuss's efforts (and now that Dollfuss was gone, his successors—whether they liked it or not—would most likely pursue a policy less favorable to Italy), the internal situation in that country would continue to deteriorate and drift further from the path Mussolini had deluded himself into believing he had set it on.

Thus, before the Anschluss returned to the table in concrete terms and became practically impossible to prevent, it was necessary for Mussolini's policy to take advantage of the favorable moment to swing as far as possible toward Paris and reach the long-awaited agreement with it, exploiting both the dual fear gripping the French—that of Germany and that of a unilateral Italian initiative—and the particular position in which, once again, Rome found itself in with regard to an England that did not want the Anschluss but did not wish to commit itself on the continent beyond what it had already done with the Tripartite Declaration of February 17, and to a France for which Italy's "guard at the Brenner" was useful—even if it worried her—and which did not want to compromise itself with it and wished to shift the burdens, both direct and indirect, onto its "Latin sister".

An anonymous editorial—though written by Mussolini—in the *Popolo d'Italia* of July 31 is extremely revealing of the Duce's intentions and tactics.

Taking his cue from French attempts to launch the Balkan security pact and with a clear allusion to the need for France to adequately compensate Italy for its friendship, he wrote:

Quo vadis, France? The world is moving forward. History does not end with the cards dealt at the Versailles table. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking that a people victorious in war and revolution for the salvation of the world—sometimes forgetting its own future—will hold the sack brimming with overflowing spoils and lend a hand to the construction of a horizon confined within the Maginot Line, at the center of which burns, awaiting the dark and propitious hour, the little fire of "guarantees."

From this perspective, it is clear that the intransigence the Italian press continued to display toward Germany in the months following the Vienna Putsch—despite German efforts to achieve a détente—should not be explained—as has generally been done—by the Duce's personal irritation at Germany's underhanded behavior and Hitler's failure to keep his word on the Austrian question, but rather—much more realistically—by Mussolini's deliberate desire to demonstrate to the French that there were profound differences between Fascism and National Socialism (especially in terms of civilization) and that a deep rift existed between Italy and Germany; at the same time, it also aimed to psychologically prepare Italians for the idea of an agreement with France.

And it is also clear why, to lend greater authority to this two-pronged effort, Mussolini himself became personally involved in it through a series of writings (almost all anonymous, but which, having been published by *Popolo d'Italia*, took on special significance—especially as the author's identity gradually began to leak out)—almost all of which were aimed at challenging and ridiculing National Socialism in its most universally condemned aspects, those that most offended the common sense and the civic and national sensibilities of Italians (racism, anti-Semitism, Italian "betrayal" in 1914–15) and

even with a few public oratorical exploits of undeniable demagogic effect, which took on the value of a master's brushstroke in the picture that the school was painting.

A typical example was the speech on September 6 in Bari:

Thirty centuries of history allow us to view with supreme contempt certain doctrines from beyond the Alps, espoused by the descendants of people who were illiterate—unable to pass down the records of their own lives—at a time when Rome had Caesar, Virgil, and Augustus.

This attitude of the Italian press and propaganda provoked strong reactions in Germany at both the governmental and public opinion levels; it should be noted, however, that while, after the Vienna coup, Italian-German diplomatic relations gradually lost—to use an expression taken from a comprehensive report by Ambassador Cerruti dated September 26 on the political situation in Germany and its foreign relations—their closeness and took on a tone of coldness, they were nevertheless maintained by the Italian side far removed from the harshness that simultaneously characterized the attitude of the Italian press.

Apart from the Austrian issue, on which it was uncompromising, on other matters (such as the Saar question) Palazzo Chigi either did not change its stance or changed it only very slightly, and never pushed things to the point of even remotely risking a genuine rupture. This would in fact have been not only imprudent and pointless at that particular moment, but—more importantly—it would have caused Italy to lose that special position on which Mussolini's entire strategy was based.

At that moment, this position had to be secured at the negotiating table with France; looking ahead—that is, in the longer term—if he wanted—as he did—to continue to maintain it, Mussolini would inevitably have to return in some way to a position of equidistance between Paris and Berlin; hence the need not to break with Germany and to limit—albeit within a framework of firmness—the conflict with Hitler essentially to the Austrian question, so that an agreement on that issue could, in the future, pave the way for a new pendulum swing in Italian politics, at the end of which, depending on the circumstances, the pendulum would find its new resting point.

Immediately after the signing of the Four-Power Pact on June 9, 1933, Ambassador De Jouvenel had urged Palazzo Chigi to address and definitively resolve Italian-French bilateral relations; Mussolini, however, had preferred for the time being to set the proposal aside and postpone everything until after the pact was signed.

A month later, on July 11, De Jouvenel returned to the fray with a four-point memorandum, according to which Paris and Rome were to:

a) declare that they harbored no territorial ambitions in Central Europe;

b) commit to maintaining Austrian independence;

c) avoid any action that would hinder the establishment of an agreement between Austria, Hungary, and the Little Entente;

d) recognize that an agreement on disarmament—and, therefore, on Germany's "parity"—could not be achieved without an adequate system of controls and a trial period.

As can be seen—and as the British had immediately observed with concern (since they regarded an Anglo-French-Italian agreement as the only effective bulwark for the defense of peace and thus desired and urged a genuine clarification of Franco-Italian relations)—with this proposal, Paris was "putting the cart before the horse," by proposing a general agreement to Rome before clearing the way of the bilateral issues still pending.

Nevertheless, Mussolini had accepted the first two points of the French proposal and, regarding the other two, had limited himself to requesting—for the third—that Rome and Paris actively participate in the process of implementing the agreement, and—for the fourth—that the French clarify their position on the issue of the trial period (which he knew was strongly opposed by Berlin).

Following this agreement in principle, discussions had once again stalled, pending the conclusion of De Jouvenel's mission to Rome and the arrival of his successor, De Chambrun, at Palazzo Farnese—although, as evidence of the good relations between the two countries, there was growing talk from various quarters of an upcoming visit to Rome by Daladier. Nor had any progress been made once De Chambrun took office, given that—even though Mussolini had accepted, as we have seen, the Anglo-French amendments to the British disarmament plan and, consequently, had aligned himself with London and Paris against Berlin on October 14—the French, for their part, had continued to insist above all on cooperation to be achieved in Central Europe, sidestepping the other unresolved issues.

Negotiations on these issues did not begin until the end of the year, when the French attempted to resume the naval talks. After the very first exchanges, however, the negotiations immediately stalled, as the Italian side sought to link the discussions on naval parity—which were, moreover, framed in very rigid terms—to those on colonial compensation.

The worsening of the domestic political situation in France and its governmental instability (between November 1933 and February 1934, five governments succeeded one another; the "Stavisky Affair" erupted , and on February 6, Paris was the scene of a massive right-wing demonstration that toppled the newly formed second Daladier cabinet, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries) had subsequently contributed to their de facto suspension.

Despite this interruption, however, everything was now pointing toward an agreement. In France in particular, the number of those who, concerned by the German threat, were now willing to reach an agreement with Italy was increasing significantly.

On the political front, moreover, two very important circumstances were increasingly pushing toward an agreement: Britain's reluctance to commit itself further on the continent (and thus the need to secure at least clear Italian support) and the difficulties that, under German pressure, the French system was encountering more and more in Central and Eastern Europe (symptomatic of this were the German-Polish non-aggression pact signed on January 26, 1934, and the increasingly cordial relations between Germany and Yugoslavia); difficulties which, in turn, made it harder to bring about that "Eastern Pact" through which Paris hoped, on the one hand, to create a sort of "cordon sanitaire" to the east of Germany and, on the other hand, to link its own system in those regions to the Italian one and to the

Balkan Pact formed in February 1934 between Greece, Turkey, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

Aside from France's internal difficulties, however, the reason the negotiations were stalling lay solely in Mussolini's reluctance to appear overly interested in them—so that it would be France that had to take the initiative to press for them—and in the persistent hope of Barthou, the new French foreign minister as of February 9, 1934, that he might, before negotiating with Rome, launch the "Eastern Pact" to include in the negotiations the settlement of mutual interests in the Danube-Balkan region.

It is significant in this regard that, despite the interruption of the negotiations, the French—through Prime Minister Doumergue himself—had continued to express their conviction regarding the need for a close agreement between the two countries and, above all, that Mussolini—as we have seen—had deemed the time had come to begin thinking of Ethiopia as a problem to be addressed in the relatively near future.

It is equally significant, moreover, that once the meeting with Hitler had been arranged, Mussolini had hastened—to avoid any ambiguity or misunderstanding—to inform the French immediately.

This state of affairs explains why, once the domestic situation in France had stabilized somewhat and in anticipation of the resumption of the Geneva conference on disarmament, on May 25, 1934, Barthou, speaking in the Chamber of Deputies on the government's foreign policy, not only made a point of recalling the Anglo-French-Italian declaration in support of Austrian independence from February, but also stated that it seemed impossible to him that France and Italy would not reach a cordial, loyal, and definitive agreement, and two weeks later, in Geneva, he announced that, following the conference, he would travel to Belgrade and Bucharest (where he would advocate for a rapprochement between those governments and Italy) and that he intended to meet with Mussolini in Rome afterward, likely in July.

At the same time, the Minister of the Navy, Pietri, speaking with Theodoli, had taken a more practical approach, even touching on colonial issues.

In anticipation of Barthou's visit, in mid-July Palazzo Chigi had decided on the course of action to take regarding colonial issues.

Aloisi's diary indicates that it had been decided "to immediately clear the way regarding the two issues of Libya and Tunisia in order to allow for subsequent discussions on Djibouti."

"In fact," Aloisi noted, "this last issue is pressing, given the rather bellicose tendencies manifesting on all sides toward Abyssinia."

This entry (followed on July 20 by another in which we learn that Aloisi had spoken that day with De Chambrun about the Tunisian issue and the Libyan borders, gaining the impression that the French were hostile to extending the latter as far as Lake Chad—since this would have split their African empire in two—and were instead, perhaps, more favorable to a consolidation of Italian holdings in East Africa) reveals only to a very limited extent what Italy's actual stance on colonial matters was, both in the short and long term. To gain a precise understanding of what was being thought at Palazzo Chigi at that time regarding this matter, one must refer to a memo prepared on July 16, at the conclusion of the consultations between Suvich, Aloisi, and Buti.

Given its extreme importance, we reproduce it in its entirety:

With regard to Barthou's possible visit to Rome, it appears that the solutions that might be proposed to resolve the two issues—Tunis and colonial compensation—with France could be based on the following criteria:

a) First, the concept should be put forward that the resolution of the two aforementioned issues should pave the way for a broader Italian-French agreement in the colonial sphere, based on France's interest in consolidating and making its colonial rule in North Africa more homogeneous, and Italy's interest in acquiring a territory capable of satisfying our needs for demographic outlet and the supply of raw materials. In short: Italy's withdrawal from French North Africa; France's withdrawal from East Africa, including Ethiopia. (Laval said in 1932: "Italy will renounce its right of oversight over North Africa, just as France will turn a blind eye to Italy's colonial policy and actions in East Africa.") Just as the Anglo-French colonial agreement of 1904 (British non-interference in Morocco, French non-interference in Egypt) eliminated colonial friction between France and England for many years, so too would a far-reaching Italian-French agreement (as expressed to me by Pietri) eliminate causes of disagreement and discontent, enable France and Italy to work unhindered for decades in their respective spheres of influence, lay the foundation for Italian-French cooperation in other African regions (as I will discuss below), and ultimately facilitate an understanding in the broader realm of European and world politics, to the benefit of peace.

b) If the French were to adopt this line of thinking, they should, for the time being, aim to resolve the pending colonial issues with France, guided by the prospect of a more general agreement along the lines outlined above.

Consequently:

1. TUNIS

Propose to the French the renewal of the 1896 Conventions for a period of 10 years.

If one were to ask what would become of the Conventions themselves upon the expiration of that period, one would have to reply that their fate would depend—possibly even before that period had elapsed—on whether or not the broader colonial agreement mentioned above were concluded with France.

2. COMPENSATION DUE TO US FROM FRANCE UNDER ARTICLE 13 OF THE LONDON TREATY.

The Bonin-Pichon Agreement of 1919 settled, to Italy's advantage, the Italian-French dispute concerning the as-yet-undefined sovereignty over two salient points (Bec-de-Cana) on Libya's western borders, one between Ghadames and Ghat, and the other between Tummo. Under this agreement, Italy was guaranteed direct communication routes between Ghadames and Ghat and between Ghat and Tummo.

However, in the implementation of the Bonin-Pichon Agreement, a dispute persists regarding the status of In Ezzan, which the French contest as belonging to Libya and continue to occupy despite our protests.

In any case, the Bonin-Pichon Agreement grants Italy only a very small advance on the colonial compensation owed to us by France under Article I of the Treaty of London. In fact, the Bonin-Pichon Agreement itself explicitly recognized that the issue of compensation was to be further examined.

Article 13 of the London Pact, by stipulating that "the equitable colonial compensation to be awarded to Italy should be sought explicitly (nommement) in the settlement in our favor of issues concerning the borders of the Italian colonies," implies that such compensation may be awarded to us in another area rather than along the Libyan borders.

In fact, our initial requests for colonial compensation from France included the cession of Djibouti along with the entire French Somali Coast, but France flatly rejected this request at the time, pointing out that Djibouti constitutes an indispensable stopover for French communications with Indochina and Madagascar (conversation between Tittoni, Clemenceau, Theodoli, and Pichon in August 1919).

On the other hand, in resolving the issue of Libya's southern borders, the Royal Ministry of the Colonies appears to be aiming not so much at acquiring additional desert territory as at establishing a border equipped with outposts for the necessary surveillance.

For this reason, and also because the resolution of the issue of colonial compensation is intended to pave the way—in agreement with France—for a greater assertion of our territorial claims in East Africa, it would seem appropriate to request the compensation due to us in this area.

In the private conversations between Theodoli, De Caix, and Berthelot, which took place in 1932–33, the French side [sic] expressed interest and even discussed the possible cession to Italy of a strip of territory along the French Somali Coast. Certainly, in June 1933, Theodoli, in responding to a question from Ambassador de Jouvenel, mentioned to him the possibility that, in order to settle the matter of the compensation owed to us by France, and as a first step toward eventually reaching a definitive settlement of colonial issues that would satisfy Italy's need for territories for settlement and raw materials, France might cede to Italy the entire French Somali Coast except for Djibouti, a port considered necessary by the Republic for its communications with Indochina and Madagascar.

In June 1934 in Geneva, Theodoli also had the opportunity to mention this to Messrs. Barthou and Pietri, without encountering any opposition in principle.

In this regard, it should be noted that the French Somali Coast is a semi-desert territory of no economic importance in and of itself; however, its cession to Italy would have extremely significant political implications, as it would sever the territorial contiguity between Ethiopia and the French possession of Djibouti, and would enable us to control traffic on the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway, a section of which would remain in Italian territory.

Such a cession would also constitute an initial demonstration of French disinterest in Ethiopia, and would allow us to proceed more actively in establishing our own economic interests in the Empire, while leaving us free to determine whether and to what extent it is in our interest to act in Ethiopia.

It therefore seems, in principle, advisable to propose to the French government, as a possible solution to the issue of colonial compensation, the cession to Italy of all of French Somaliland, excluding Djibouti.

Should this solution be generally well-received at the Quai d'Orsay, it would be necessary to work out detailed agreements regarding the Djibouti railway and the maintenance of French rights over certain Ethiopian regions, in accordance with the provisions of the 1906 Tripartite Agreement.

At a later stage—within the broader, potential Italian-French colonial agreement mentioned above—we could attempt to secure France's renunciation of its rights in Ethiopia by, for our part, relinquishing those special rights we still enjoy in Tunisia and French Morocco.

Two things are clear from this note. By mid-July 1934, both at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which is not surprising given what we have said about the enthusiasm and hopes that Laval's words to Grandi had aroused there exactly three years earlier) and at the Ministry of the Colonies (where, evidently, with Federzoni's departure, the supporters of the Chad-Cameroon line had lost ground) all eyes were now turned toward Ethiopia.

At the same time, however, at this juncture, Palazzo Chigi's policy toward Ethiopia was still guided by a perspective of essentially long-term timeframes, which even Mussolini—unless one assumes a deliberate reticence on his part even toward Suvich, which would be difficult to explain—must in practice have shared.

For while it is true that as early as February 8 the Duce had told De Bono and Badoglio that action was needed in Ethiopia, it is also true that this statement was not followed by any concrete positive action (that is, other than continuing along the path—begun a year and a half earlier—of drawing up operational plans and conducting studies on the logistical requirements for a possible campaign, or in the approach now adopted of reinforcing local forces in Eritrea with additional personnel and equipment), and that as late as September, Suvich would report to Aloisi that, according to Mussolini, the war in Ethiopia would take place in a couple of years, since nothing could be done without "adequate international preparation."

This suggests that when the memo in question was drafted, Palazzo Chigi was essentially merely putting the Duce's directives on paper, and that the decision, at the end of December, to take action on short notice was largely determined by the occurrence of two new and unforeseen events: the Vienna coup, which led France to feel an even greater need to reach an agreement with Italy and, therefore, to be generous in its concessions, and Laval's appointment as Foreign Minister, who—being more flexible and unscrupulous than Barthou and having long been inclined toward the idea of diverting Italy toward Ethiopia and satisfying it in those lands—proved willing to effectively give Mussolini a free hand in East Africa in order to finally bind him to France.

For the time being, however, the note of July 15 had gone unheeded.

The Vienna coup had, in fact, forced Barthou to postpone his visit to Rome. On the other hand, it had further strengthened the camp of supporters of an agreement with Italy in France and prompted Mussolini to reconsider his position toward Yugoslavia, convincing him to seek a rapprochement with Belgrade, so as to counter the growing friendship that was developing between the Yugoslavs and the Germans (which explains why, at the time of the Vienna coup, troops had been deployed not so much near the Brenner Pass as near Tarvisio, so that they could potentially be used in Carinthia against the Yugoslavs—and not only against the Germans)—and at the same time clear the path to an agreement with Paris of the obstacle posed by poor Italian-Yugoslav relations.

The Anglo-French-Italian declaration of September 27 on Austrian independence, the talks that had taken place in Geneva between Aloisi and Barthou during its drafting, and British pressure on Paris and Rome had in turn led to further progress, so much so that the French foreign minister's visit to Rome, scheduled for late October, was now viewed by both sides in a very positive light.

For Palazzo Chigi, the only remaining point of uncertainty was Barthou's insistence on the "Eastern Pact." This single issue, however, could no longer constitute an obstacle to an agreement that both sides —albeit for very different reasons—now wished to achieve and that the Italian side no longer wished to delay, since it was well understood that this was the best moment, both politically and psychologically.

So much so that, for the first time in many months, Mussolini took the initiative to clear the way of the final obstacles. In Milan on October 6, speaking before a huge crowd, he not only stated that he ardently desired an agreement with France, but, more importantly, he declared that, despite the controversies—both from Nevoso and "across the Adriatic"—that were poisoning Italian-Yugoslav relations, he was convinced that there was still the possibility of an understanding between the two countries "for which precise factual conditions exist."

According to Aloisi, this was "a clear invitation to Yugoslavia," and, in fact, it was understood as such in both Paris and Prague. At the time, however, the démarche yielded no practical results. Three days later, on October 9, in Marseille, King Alexander of Yugoslavia was shot by a Ustasha assassin, and Barthou was also killed in the attack.

The assassination in Marseille created considerable difficulties for the Italian government. The Ustaše, extremist Croatian autonomists, had maintained close ties with the Italian authorities for several years. Ante Pavelic, one of the movement's leading figures and its future leader, had been in contact with Rome since 1927.

After King Alexander's coup d'état in January 1929, many of them had taken refuge in Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria, and Germany, from where they had continued their propaganda in favor of Croatian independence and established a vast clandestine terrorist network that, in coordination with elements back home, had organized numerous attacks and acts of sabotage. Contacts had also been established with local far-right groups (including National Socialists) and, above all, with the Hungarian government, which immediately saw the Ustaše as an important pawn for undermining Yugoslavia and, through it, the Little Entente.

Many had also taken refuge in Italy or had made it one of their main bases of support, including Pavelic (who had been sentenced to death in Yugoslavia for high treason).

Officially, the Italian authorities had gradually gathered the Croatian exiles in a number of "collection camps" in remote locations; however, the Ustaše enjoyed complete freedom of movement, and some of these camps had been transformed into training camps.

Both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (where, even before the rise of Fascism, there were those who toyed with the idea of destabilizing the Yugoslav state by exploiting the conflicts between Serbs and other Yugoslav nationalities) had, in fact, established close ties with Ustasha leaders, to the point of creating a Croatia Office at Palazzo Chigi and a special fund (70,000 lire per month) to support their activities, and to the point of supplying weapons and ammunition to groups operating within Yugoslavia.

A typical example of those "parallel activities" that were becoming increasingly prevalent at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as its fascistization progressed, relations with the Ustaše had become an element—never decisive, but dangerously present, if only as a backup option—of Italian policy toward the neighboring Balkan kingdom and, as such, had been discussed on several occasions in conversations with the Hungarians.

Specifically, Rome had given Pavelic a free hand only once, in the fall of 1932, when armed Ustasha groups had penetrated from the Zadar area into the Lika region to attempt an insurrection—though they ultimately failed.

After this episode, however, officials at Palazzo Chigi had become more cautious, both because it had demonstrated that—contrary to hopes—Yugoslavia was still far from a state of internal dissolution, and because of the diplomatic complications and the discredit that operations of this kind could bring.

This does not, however, mean that the idea of one day establishing at least a Croatian buffer state with a unified customs union with Italy had been abandoned, nor that relations with the Ustaše (who, in the meantime, had also forged ties with the Macedonians) had been severed.

In early 1934, however, Suvich and Aloisi—in light of the new reality of Italian-French relations—had decided to set aside Croatian policy, and on April 27, Mussolini himself had instructed Aloisi that "it is time to put an end to this useless and dangerous group [the Ustaše]."

In light of these facts and, more generally, of Italy's interest at that time in not dramatizing the situation and, indeed, in normalizing relations with Belgrade to some extent, it is very difficult—if not impossible—to believe that the Italians were the masterminds behind the assassins of King Alexander and Barthou.

Moreover, when, after the fall of Fascism, attempts were made to shed light on the alleged Italian involvement, the evidence gathered was so vague that it could not be taken seriously. On the contrary, it cannot be ruled out at all that the assassination—even though it had long been part of the Ustasha's plans (who had already organized other attacks against the king)—was encouraged and facilitated by those who, at that particular moment, had the greatest interest in preventing an Italian-Yugoslav rapprochement and in derailing the Italian-French agreement.

Namely, the Germans (Göring spoke at King Alexander's funeral and made statements supporting the inviolability of Yugoslav borders) and, above all, the Hungarians. And it is certainly not without significance that in Rome, the tragedy in Marseille was not only viewed as an event that "halts all our immediate plans," given that "Barthou was supposed to… persuade the King of Yugoslavia to enter into negotiations with Italy, which were our intention," but both of the aforementioned hypotheses were also put forward, based, in part, on certain intelligence gathered by the secret services—certainly not decisive, but nonetheless quite significant.

Thus, it seems impossible to us to share the certainty with which Sforza and Salvemini spoke of a "crime of Mussolini's regime," and we believe, instead, that Duroselle is correct (apart from his underestimation of the Hungarian factor) when he writes:

The perpetrators of the assassination were Croatian terrorists belonging to the secret society "Ustasa." Its leader, Ante Pavelic, had left Yugoslavia in 1929 and had taken refuge primarily in Italy and Hungary. Hitler was on good terms with the Ustasa… but the Ustasa's true supporter was Mussolini. However, in October 1934, the Duce—still concerned about the threat of the Anschluss—had no interest in encouraging an assassination attempt like the one in Marseille. Barthou was scheduled to travel to Rome, and an agreement between France and Italy was in the works. If the assassination in

Marseille was not the result of a Croatian initiative, it was solely due to German influence. But this is an unverifiable hypothesis. However, on the eve of the assassination, Pavelic had suddenly left Berlin for Milan. He was arrested in Turin on October 18, along with another conspirator, Kwaternik. Mussolini, for his part, refused to grant their extradition. He did not meet Pavelic for the first time until April 1941.

In terms of immediate political implications and, above all, public opinion, however, all of this was practically irrelevant. What mattered was that the ties between the Italian government and the Ustaše were well known, as was the freedom they enjoyed in Italy, and that they had long been denounced by the Yugoslav press and others.

Even more significant was the fact that the assassins appeared to be men working for Pavelic—who was in Italy at the time—and had arrived in France from Italy, where they had been trained and had obtained their weapons. This explains the outcry against Italy (as well as against Hungary) that immediately arose in Yugoslavia and that also swept through large segments of the Western press, especially the left-wing press, which, following the lead of *Le Populaire* on October 11 and 12, immediately linked the assassination in Marseille to Italian machinations in Yugoslavia and spoke of collusion between the Ustaše and the Fascists in the attack.

In a different European political climate, a press campaign of this kind would certainly have had a profound impact not only on Italian-Yugoslav relations but also on Italian-French relations. At that time, however, interest in the agreement between France and Italy was so strong—in Paris, London, and even Prague—that, once the initial days of excitement had passed, the prevailing tendency was to bury as quickly as possible not only the victims of the Marseille attack but also the political issue they represented, and above all to prevent relations between Paris and Rome from bearing the brunt of the fallout.

While in Italy the arrest of Pavelic and some of his associates was ordered (though the French request for their extradition was denied on the grounds that it was not provided for in cases of political crimes) and strict surveillance was imposed on the Ustaše, Paris and even Prague worked to moderate the Yugoslavs and, in practice, to redirect their protests toward Budapest.

And when the Yugoslavs brought the matter before the League of Nations, all efforts were directed toward resolving the Yugoslav-Hungarian conflict as painlessly as possible and in such a way that Mussolini would not feel compelled—to save his prestige and influence over Budapest—to take too strong a stance in favor of Hungary.

Decisive in this regard was the role of Laval, who, following Barthou’s death, had taken over the Foreign Ministry and, more importantly, had continued to lead it even after the now-severely weakened Doumergue government fell and the Flandin government was formed on November 13. As Ormos wrote, by his own admission, it was he who gave the Yugoslav government the idea of taking action against Hungary and simultaneously explained to all the foreign ministers of the Little Entente countries that they were to speak only of Hungarian complicity in the assassination affair, since his plans and his Italian policy could not allow Rome to become involved in this matter.

Since it was clear that this same policy did not even allow for overly forceful action against Hungary—an ally of Italy—Laval took on the role of mediator alongside Etien at the League of Nations to persuade Yugoslavia to exercise restraint toward Hungary.

The foreign ministers of Czechoslovakia and Romania reportedly supported this maneuver, and despite strong pressure from public opinion, the Yugoslav government nevertheless decided to acquiesce, even though everyone was convinced that the strings behind the assassination attempt had been pulled from Rome.

So, in the end, one could—paradoxically—almost say that, once the initial wave of sensational accusations had subsided, the assassination of King Alexander ended up benefiting Mussolini, since—given the state of mind of Yugoslav public opinion—Paris could no longer insist on linking the Italian-Yugoslav rapprochement to the Franco-Italian agreements and had to settle for acknowledging Mussolini's good intentions for the future. Likewise, the assassination of Barthou also benefited him, since his successor, Laval, was not only even more determined than he was to reach an agreement with Italy, but was also less attached to the prospect of the "Eastern Pact" and, above all, was an extremely unscrupulous and realistic politician, far more flexible and willing to make many more compromises in order to pursue a policy in which he firmly believed and on which he staked his political fortunes.

The best evidence of this lies in the course of the negotiations that preceded and paved the way for Laval's visit to Rome.

The decisive phase of the negotiations began on November 15, when the French summarized in writing their position on the various issues discussed thus far and forwarded the document to Rome. Five days later, on November 20, Flandin received the Italian ambassador in Paris and confirmed his government's willingness to reach an agreement.

According to the report of the meeting sent to Rome, Flandin, after opening by stating that "the era of anti-fascism and Masonic hostility" toward Italy was "now over and will not return" ("every country has the regime that suits it; a regime cannot be 'copied' from one country to another") and that "France wishes to treat Italy as an equal," he focused primarily on two points:

1) his government sought an agreement with Rome and London "that would confront Germany with a blockade by the three great powers whenever it overstepped the mark";

2) the Italian government had every interest in ensuring that Yugoslavia did not "fall into Germany's lap" and, therefore, in "resolving its minor disputes with Yugoslavia and making use of France's efforts to facilitate this rapprochement."

At the same time, in Rome, Mussolini received De Chambrun and discussed with him the French proposals made five days earlier. We have no record of this conversation; however, its gist can be inferred from the dispatch that Ambassador Pignatti sent to Rome the following day, after having met in turn with the Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay:

Tignoler asked me to stop by his office to inform me of the content of the French counterproposals and of the conversation that Count de Chambrun had yesterday with the Italian Head of Government.

1. DISARMAMENT.

a) France requested that Italy commit to ensuring that the issue of Germany's rearmament be brought back to the table during preliminary talks. We agreed.

b) In the event that the issue of disarmament is brought up for discussion again, France requests that it be granted military superiority over Germany to compensate for the latter's advantage in terms of industrial capacity.

2. AUSTRIA.

The Duce agrees with the idea put forward by France to guarantee Austria's independence through a treaty. The agreement, which should be endorsed—at least morally—in Geneva, would include Italy, France, England (if possible), and Austria's neighboring states on an equal footing. The Ambassador specifically mentioned the Little Entente.

3. YUGOSLAVIA.

France has requested that our relations with Yugoslavia be improved. Léger spoke to me of a friendship pact that we could conclude with our neighbors. The Duce would not have raised any objections in principle. He did, however, state that he intends to wait until an atmosphere conducive to its acceptance has been established—an atmosphere that does not exist at the moment. The Duce stated that he will convene the press on the island of Lipari.

4. LIBYAN BORDERS.

Agreed in principle. The agreement can easily be implemented after the issue has been examined by Italian technical experts.

5. TUNIS.

De Chambrun’s telegram is unclear on this point. The Duce said he needs a very long period of time, but the Ambassador does not say whether or not the Italian Head of Government has accepted that, after the transition period, the Italian proposal regarding Tunisia will be entirely withdrawn. The Quai d’Orsay will ask de Chambrun to clarify this point further.

6. SOMALI COAST.

It appeared that the Duce did not pay much attention to the railway issue. The Ambassador offered to increase the number of Italian representatives on the Railway’s Board of Directors from one to two. Until now, the Italian representative was merely a figurehead; now he would become a full member. This would entail the transfer of certain obligations to us. Regarding the proposed border adjustment, the Duce requested that it be clearly marked on the map. The current French proposal, however, is not clearly marked.

7. ABYSSINIA.

The Duce took a keen interest in this point of the conversation.

France is willing not to hinder our economic and commercial activities, limiting its own to the French sphere of influence. According to Leger, Rome has requested the passage of Italian troops via the railway.

De Chambrun’s overall impression was favorable. The major difficulty lies in Italian-Yugoslav relations. Regarding Tunis, we must await the requested clarifications.

From this dispatch and from the Italian documentation regarding the talks that took place in Rome (between Mussolini, Suvich, de Chambrun, and Bérenger) and in Geneva (between Aloisi and Laval) between late November and mid-December, it is clear that in this initial phase of the negotiations, the French side still sought to proceed along what must have been Barthou’s line of thought; that is, they sought to give the agreement as general a character as possible, so as to resolve all controversial or otherwise unresolved issues (including that of the mandates), and above all to secure the inclusion of the Little Entente—or, at the very least, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia—among the guarantor states of Austrian independence, thereby achieving a settlement of both the specific Italian-Yugoslav relations

and the general Franco-Italian relations concerning the Danube region.

The same documentation shows just as clearly, however, that the Italian side sought to counter this prospect, since, if accepted, it would, on the one hand, have reduced Rome's room for maneuver in the Balkan-Danube region and entailed the practical abandonment of the positions gained in Hungary and, on the other hand, would have made it difficult to reopen broader colonial negotiations with Paris at a later date.

Hence the reluctance to definitively settle the Tunisian question and to accept the French approach to the Syrian question and—above all—the opposition to linking the Little Entente to the guarantee for Austria and to making the Danube question the de facto central point of the negotiations.

Among the various documents that could be cited in this regard, the most illuminating is the following note from Mussolini, transmitted by Suvich to De Chambrun on December 11:

December 10, 1934.

As far as Austria is concerned, it is not clear why its independence should also be guaranteed by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. France never requested this.

Previous declarations were always made by three parties: France, England, and Italy.

If Germany were added to this group, the guarantee would be complete. The important thing is that Italy and France have a common position and are ready to reaffirm it for the third time. One does not safeguard the independence of a state by first undermining it politically and morally.

Under the current circumstances, until the entire situation that has arisen following the attack in Marseille—and especially after the expulsion of the Hungarians from Yugoslavia—has been clarified, I do not intend to make any statement regarding Belgrade.

Here, too, a certain atmosphere needs to be established—one that does not exist today.

Belgrade knows—see my statements to Drummond as relayed to Henderson—that Italy harbors no aggressive intentions toward Belgrade. This may suffice for the time being.

Just as France is not being asked to abandon Yugoslavia or the Little Entente in general, either as a consequence of or simultaneously with the agreement with Italy, so Italy must not be asked to abandon Austria and Hungary. France fears that Yugoslavia might fall into Berlin's orbit; but the same fear could be harbored regarding Austria and Hungary, should they be abandoned by Italy.

The Franco-Italian agreement must be reached without sacrificing their respective Danubian nations; indeed, this agreement may provide the means to bring them closer together.

In any case, Italy must not be asked to pass through Belgrade to reach Paris.

Given this persistent underlying conflict, by mid-December the negotiations seemed to have reached a virtual standstill. Aloisi's diary is eloquent on this point and clearly illustrates the concerns that this conflict aroused among the "career diplomats" and his desire for greater flexibility on Mussolini's part.

After a period of stagnation in the negotiations, they resumed with renewed vigor in the final days of the year, and although concerns about a possible breakdown persisted until the very last moment, a preliminary agreement in principle was finally reached on January 2, 1935.

Two days later, Laval arrived in Rome to meet with Mussolini and finalize the agreement.

To understand how the preliminary agreement and Laval's trip came about, it is necessary to grasp just how indispensable the agreement was to both Mussolini and Laval. If one understands this, it becomes clear that all the disagreements during the first phase of the negotiations were in reality nothing more than skirmishes staged by both sides in an attempt to pay a lower price and to secure "bargaining chips" on which to compromise at the opportune moment, thereby demonstrating their goodwill and willingness to meet halfway.

For Mussolini, the agreement was absolutely necessary, since without it he could not have launched his Ethiopian policy; moreover, the Duce was well aware that the favorable circumstances for implementing that policy would not last long, for as soon as Germany had an armed force worthy of the name at its disposal, the European situation would irreparably deteriorate, and Italy would no longer have any possibility of diverting its attention and forces away from it.

Hence—while taking care not to reveal to the PNF, which would not have tolerated it, that in order to reach an agreement with Paris he had gone through Belgrade or had even merely yielded to Yugoslav demands to some extent—his willingness to compromise and make concessions to France on a whole series of issues and, ultimately, to run the risk of failing to achieve everything that was achievable, just to obtain Paris's general approval of his Ethiopian plans.

Hence, once again, when around Christmas the standoff seemed so severe as to raise fears of a breakdown in negotiations, on the one hand, he adopted an attitude of maximum flexibility (to the point of declaring himself willing to meet with Laval starting January 3, provided a preliminary agreement had been reached) and declared himself willing to accept in principle for Ethiopia "the withdrawal formula proposed by Mr. Laval… dictated by reasons of prudence," subject to revising it "according to Italy's wishes" directly with the French foreign minister; and, on the other hand, his simultaneous resort to more or less explicit threats.

In fact, we do not believe the last part of the report—drafted by Suvich—on the December 27 meeting between Mussolini, Suvich himself, and De Chambrun regarding the status of the negotiations can be interpreted any other way. It reads:

The Head of Government observes that the concessions regarding Somalia and Eritrea are fundamental. France already has a vast colonial empire that guarantees its future. Italy finds the rest of the world closed off to it; it has one opportunity for expansion—albeit with many difficulties—in Abyssinia. This outlet must not be closed to it as well if Italy is to serve as a factor in maintaining the general balance; otherwise, "nous pourrions gâcher la fête, au moins par trois inquiétudes."

It is important that France limit its zone of commercial influence to a strip along the railroad and take no interest in anything else.

The best proof that this was Mussolini's true state of mind is demonstrated by the fact that, as soon as he was certain the agreement would be reached and that Laval would give him a free hand in Ethiopia, on December 30—even before Laval arrived in Rome and the agreement was finalized—he, as we shall see in a later chapter, effectively launched the concrete preparations for military operations in East Africa.

So much for Mussolini. However, one must by no means believe that, for Laval, the agreement with Italy was any less necessary or urgent. Aside from the fact—which is in itself telling—that Laval, once the agreement was concluded, boasted to his government that he had secured it for less than he had been authorized to concede to Mussolini, there is in fact no doubt that Laval had two very good reasons for wanting to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion at any cost.

As foreign minister, he wanted to conclude them because, in light of the events in Austria, the reports regarding Hitler's secret rearmament, and the threat that Germany might destabilize the French system in Europe, France needed—both politically and psychologically—to feel that Italy was a close ally, especially since, in many respects, the agreement with Italy could help Paris overcome, at least in part, British reluctance to commit further to the continent.

As a politician, moreover, he wanted to conclude the agreements because he knew full well that Herriot would not want him at the Quai d'Orsay and that Flandin himself—who was closely tied to the

Radical-Socialist leader—did not want him to establish himself there and would have preferred to conclude the agreement with Mussolini himself; so for Laval, the agreement was not only the realization of his political agenda but also the surest way to strengthen his personal prestige and definitively consolidate his position in the French government.

Laval—as mentioned—arrived in Rome on the evening of January 4; accompanying him, among others, was the Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay, Léger.

The various points of the agreements he was to finalize with Mussolini had been worked out during an almost frantic succession of meetings (including nighttime sessions) that, from December 27 until the start of the talks between the two politicians, had involved primarily Suvich and Buti on the Italian side and De Chambrun on the French side.

Mussolini and Laval held two official conversations (accounts of which were drafted by Suvich, who participated in both, as did De Chambrun), the first on January 5 from 10:00 to 11:45 a.m., and the second the following day at the same time.

Despite both sides' interest in reaching a conclusion, these two talks did not yet lead to a final agreement.

During the first meeting, the two discussed primarily the situation in Germany and Austria, as well as colonial issues. They agreed on the gravity of the German situation, particularly regarding the actual rearmament that Hitler had secretly initiated.

The only way to prevent this was through war. However, this was not feasible, and—according to Mussolini—"even a war waged solely to punish Germany for failing to uphold the terms of the treaties would be unpopular." Thus, the best course of action would be to negotiate with Germany for recognition of its rearmament while securing the necessary guarantees for ourselves, which could include Germany's return to the League of Nations and the establishment of a margin of superiority for us.

It should be noted, however, that such control is not easy."

Laval agreed, although he made no secret of the fact that such a solution would encounter difficulties "from the political establishment and from part of the French press and public opinion."

The proposed agreement for Austria could have been a step in this direction, although the two disagreed on its optimal duration—ten years for Mussolini, and for Laval, "a minimum period of twenty-five years."

As for colonial issues, the Italian side insisted that the French offers were insufficient (both in southern Libya and in French Somalia), while the French side argued that the transition period envisaged for the definitive liberation of Tunisia from the burdens of 1896 was too long. The colonial issues, however, were dealt with primarily by Suvich. Mussolini limited himself almost exclusively, toward the end of the meeting, to emphasizing Ethiopia.

According to Suvich's account:

The Head of Government points out that the main issue for him is the question of a free hand in Ethiopia, the so-called désistement.

Laval is in complete agreement with this principle. He merely wishes to find a formulation that would present the French position as correct even if it were to be made public tomorrow.

Suvich notes that such a formula is being worked out and will be presented tomorrow for approval.

During the second meeting, the following day, Laval raised the issue of the Danube and Italian-Yugoslav relations. First, he informed Mussolini that Beneš had instructed him to let him know that nothing in any of the agreements of the Little Entente was directed against Italy and that he would appreciate it if the Duce would issue a statement—preferably in writing—confirming the non-existence of any military alliance between Italy and Hungary.

Mussolini confirmed that no such alliance existed but refused to issue a written statement.

As for Yugoslavia, the requests relayed by Laval were: a form of consultation regarding Austria, given "that it can never allow Italy to enter Austria on its own in the event of unrest," compensation for the attack in Marseille; that Italy cease "harboring terrorists" and that the implicated Croats residing in Italy be brought to trial; and that the Italian-Austro-Hungarian protocols of March 1934 be opened to other countries as well.

The Italian responses to these demands reflect Mussolini's dual concern: on the one hand, not to make formal concessions—which his prestige could not allow and which would have created difficulties with a large part of the PNF—but, at the same time, to reassure Laval and, through him, Yugoslavia, by making it clear that an agreement would be reached in the near future, as soon as the waters stirred up by recent controversies had calmed:

The Head of Government considers these Yugoslav notes, made in a threatening and peremptory tone, to be serious. He has already stated that he is willing to consider an improvement in relations with Yugoslavia when the time is right and under favorable circumstances.

However, he cannot accept demands made in this form and with such specific terms.

Minister Laval is quick to point out that in his most recent conversations with Jeftic, the tone has changed, and that Jeftic told him he very much hopes for the success of the negotiations in Rome and

expects them to result in an Italian-Yugoslav rapprochement.

The Head of Government reiterates that he considers a rapprochement between Italy and Yugoslavia to be a logical and desirable consequence of the Italian-French agreement, but that this can only take place once there is certainty that it will lead to favorable results.

In the meantime, the Yugoslav side must change its attitude. The irredentist propaganda, which found such a clear expression at the Congress of Yugoslav Emigrants in Maribor, must cease.

The Head of Government will have Minister Laval prepare a report on that congress.

Minister Laval asks whether the Italian Government intends to bring Pavelic and Kwaternic to trial.

The Head of Government replied that this will depend on the evidence of their alleged guilt, which France must provide.

Minister Laval believes it would be appropriate to begin a trial without waiting for the outcome of the trial in Marseille.

The Head of Government replies that this will depend precisely on the examination of the documents that are to be provided.

As for the aforementioned extension of the Rome Protocols of March, he points out that these have a specific nature and are tailored to the relations between Italy, Austria, and Hungary.

Suvich points out that it is practically impossible to extend the Protocols to third parties, since the Protocols themselves were concluded bilaterally between the individual countries concerned.

An agreement with Yugoslavia would also have been achievable, above all, if Laval had shown himself

to be genuinely willing to accept the Italian position on Ethiopia—which Mussolini considered the true cornerstone of the entire agreement. It is no coincidence that the minutes of the meeting record that, as soon as the discussion of relations with Yugoslavia concluded, the Duce returned to the importance he attached to the "désistement," receiving in return from Laval an ambiguous yet eloquent wink:

Laval reaffirmed that he fully understood the Italian position and that, aside from the economic interests France wished to safeguard, his country did not intend to hinder Italy's expansion into Abyssinia.

Parallel to these two meetings, a very intense series of contacts took place between the two delegations, seeking to define the various issues and the documents into which the agreement was to be translated.

Aloisi's diary indicates that on January 6, both in the morning and in the afternoon, many points were still contentious. In fact, the final agreement was not reached until late that night: after a dinner hosted by Laval at the Farnese Palace, Mussolini and his guest withdrew and resolved the outstanding issues in a private meeting. The next day, the agreement was signed, and on January 8, Laval departed for Paris amid grand displays of mutual friendship.

The Italian-French agreements of January 7, 1935, consisted of no fewer than seven separate agreements, some of which were made public, while others were either disclosed only to certain governments or kept secret.

The series opened with a general declaration in which, given that "the settlement of the main outstanding issues" had been ensured—in particular those related to Article 13 of the London Pact—and that any future disputes "will be resolved either through diplomatic channels or through the procedures established by the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice, and the General Act of Arbitration," it affirmed the intention of the two governments "to develop the traditional friendship that unites the two nations and to cooperate, in a spirit of mutual trust, in the maintenance of general peace."

This was followed by a protocol in which the two governments agreed to recommend to the states most directly concerned the conclusion of an agreement of "non-interference" in their respective internal affairs; initially, the agreement was to be concluded among Italy, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Austria, and be open to accession by France, Poland, and Romania. In addition, France and Italy announced that, in the event that Austria's "independence and integrity" were threatened, the two governments would consult with each other and with the Austrian government "regarding the measures to be taken" to safeguard them and would extend these consultations to the other states "in order to secure their cooperation."

The third document addressed the issue of disarmament.

Reports on this document referred generally to the two governments' joint decision that "no country may, by unilateral act, alter its obligations regarding armaments and that, should such an event occur,

they would consult one another."

In reality, the document was far from innocuous; it referred explicitly to Germany and also stipulated that, should a general convention on arms limitation be concluded, the two governments would work together to ensure that it established figures that "would guarantee both countries, in relation to Germany, the advantages that each of them would deem justified."

These first three documents of a general and European nature were followed by four concerning colonial issues. One of these was dedicated to the adjustments of the Libyan and Eritrean borders. In southern Libya, Italy obtained an area—largely desert and very sparsely populated—of approximately 114,000 square kilometers. As for the border between Eritrea and French Somalia, it was modified to include within Eritrea a stretch of coastline (approximately 21,000 square kilometers) facing the Bab el Mandeb Strait; in addition, France recognized Italian sovereignty over the island of Dumerrah.

A secret protocol attached to the agreement granted Italy free transit through the Bab el Mandeb Strait. As for the Tunisian question, it was addressed in the subsequent agreement and resolved on the basis, on the one hand, of the total or partial extension of the regulations concerning the nationality of Italians in that region and their schools—as provided for in the conventions of 1896—until 1945, 1955, 1965 (as applicable) and, on the other hand, the release of France, following these extensions, from any obligation or burden toward Italy.

Thus far, as can be seen, both the "suspended" clause of the London Agreement and the Tunisian question were settled entirely to France's advantage, freeing it from two extremely burdensome obligations at minimal cost—a cost certainly wholly inadequate to satisfy the demands that Italy had advanced through diplomatic channels and trumpeted in political, historical, and propaganda spheres for years.

As for the "suspension," one could well say that Mussolini had settled for the classic "plate of lentils"; as for the Tunisian issue, given the circumstances and the statements repeated so many times, one could even speak (and this was precisely the reaction of many Italians in Tunisia) of outright betrayal.

And it was no coincidence that comments to this effect circulated quietly even in Italy, especially in the most fervently nationalist circles. Nor could one certainly assume that the balance would tip back in Italy's favor simply because—as announced in the official communiqué issued after the agreements were concluded—within the framework of the new Italian-French collaboration aimed at developing economic relations between their respective metropolitan and colonial territories, "an Italian participation in the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway" was also included.

Baer summed up the situation well in this regard when he wrote:

The extent of Mussolini's colonial concessions was remarkable. For all their previous demands regarding the 1915 loan, the Italians were content to receive the humiliating pittance of a small, worthless portion of desert and a minuscule coastal strip on the Red Sea.

The 2,500 shares in the Djibouti railway were an insignificant pledge that did not grant control of the

company.

Later, Laval remarked that a speck of the Libyan desert had not only served to fulfill the terms of the Treaty of London but had also been given in exchange for the abolition of Italian rights in Tunisia.

Thus Laval aptly summed up that sacrifice: “Tunisia is to Italy what Alsace-Lorraine was to France.” Now those pathetic aspirations that had for so long been part of Italian thought—those claims to a privilege or, at least, to the recognition of national identity in the neighboring land of Tunisia—were publicly abandoned.

In reality, there was a benefit for Mussolini—and a significant one at that—so great that it led him to sacrifice even the aspirations of Tunisia, which were so dear to much of fascism and which he himself had repeatedly endorsed. This benefit consisted of the “désistement,” the “free hand” granted to him in Ethiopia by Laval during their private conversation on the night of January 6.

Formally, at Laval’s behest, the agreement was kept vague and took concrete form in this secret letter from Mussolini to Laval himself:

Mr. President.

Rome, January 7, 1935

I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated today, worded as follows:

“After examining the situation of Italy and France in East Africa, particularly with regard to the interests of Italian Eritrea and Italian Somalia, on the one hand, and the French Somali Coast, on the other, and in order to pursue the policy of friendly collaboration that the two governments are pursuing in the vicinity of their African possessions, the French Government declares to the Italian Government that, in the application of the agreement of December 13, 1906, and of all the agreements cited in Article I of said agreement, the French Government will not seek to satisfy any interests in Ethiopia other than economic interests relating to traffic on the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway in the zone as defined in the attached annex; however, the French Government does not thereby waive the rights that its protected nationals hold under the Franco-Ethiopian Treaty of January 10, 1908, nor the concessions they have obtained in those parts of Ethiopian territory located outside the zone referred to above, nor the renewal of said concessions.

The French Government would appreciate it if the Italian Government would kindly confirm its agreement with the foregoing and undertake to preserve, as far as it is concerned, the rights and interests defined above.

The Italian Government, confirming its agreement with the foregoing, takes note of the declaration made to it by the French Government concerning the application of the Agreement of December 13, 1906, and of all the agreements referred to in Article 1 of said Agreement; and undertakes to respect the economic interests relating to traffic on the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway in the area defined in the attached annex, as well as the rights of French citizens specified above.

Please accept, etc.

Taking advantage of the ambiguity of this letter, Laval would later claim that he had never intended to give Mussolini a “free hand” in Ethiopia except in economic matters.

His numerous statements to this effect, however, are entirely unacceptable. G. W. Baer wrote on this subject:

It is true that, formally, Laval had not entered into any secret agreement regarding the political future of Ethiopia, and it is also true that he did not give Mussolini any official approval for a war of aggression; however, beyond this, Laval’s denials cannot be taken at face value. The truth is that in Rome, Laval was willing to give Mussolini a free hand in Abyssinia—to hand it over to him—because he considered that Italian friendship was worth paying that price for.

For Laval, Ethiopia was simply an unimportant African country he knew nothing about, and one he was willing to see sacrificed if doing so would help ensure France’s security in Europe to a greater extent. Certainly, he realized that in January 1935 Mussolini was preparing for war against Abyssinia. The gravity of the Ual-Ual incident had been explained to him by the Ethiopian delegate in Geneva in December 1934. But in January, it seemed to him sheer folly to provoke Mussolini over “that petty little spring…at the end of the world”…

Therefore, while not endorsing a war of aggression against Ethiopia, Laval did not disapprove of a

certain use of force on the part of Italy.

That deliberate vagueness, that ambiguity—the calculated imprecision of Laval's conduct on this point—allowed him, strictly speaking, to be precise in his denials that he had endorsed the war, but at the same time, Mussolini could draw the equally accurate conclusion that Italy had France's support and sympathy.

Joseph Paul-Boncour described how Laval was able to give his approval to the Duce: "with a shrug of the shoulders, or a wink… Laval was able to let Mussolini know that he would not criticize him too harshly if he attempted a military expedition."

Whatever means Laval employed, his demeanor convinced Mussolini that France would not stand in the way of the Abyssinian campaign and allowed Mussolini to accept the broadest, most generous interpretation of that "wink."

That was enough to satisfy Mussolini and to bring about the Franco-Italian agreement of January 7, 1935.

Until yesterday, Baer's account and explanation was the most balanced and reliable account written on the subject. Today, however, we are convinced that we can go further and assert in no uncertain terms that Laval gave Mussolini a completely free hand in Rome, even though, on the one hand, he sought to protect himself by not making any clear commitment to that effect and, on the other hand, it is highly likely that he actually advised the Duce to proceed as cautiously as possible.

Italian diplomatic records clearly show, in fact, that Laval had for years been planning to "divert" Italy's attention toward Ethiopia and that all the negotiations preceding and accompanying the Rome agreements were, on the Italian side, centered on the "désistement"; thus, it is absurd to think that a politician of Laval's stature and unscrupulousness could have misinterpreted the situation or harbored any other illusions.

The decisive element for us, however, is the text of the "désistement" drafted on January 4 between the Italians and the French in preparation for the Mussolini-Laval talks. It shows, in fact, beyond a shadow of a doubt that the French—and therefore Laval—were aware of and, in principle, accepted the Italian point of view.

The fact that they subsequently chose to fall back on the less binding and more ambiguous wording of Mussolini's letter to Laval does not diminish the document's importance in this regard; if anything, it indirectly confirms that the French—fully aware of what they were about to agree to—sought to avoid leaving overly explicit traces of their consent.

Here is the text of the "désistement," dated January 4 and marked as secret; decisive in it is the explicit reference in point two to the "case of modifications to the status quo in the region in question," which puts an end to any possibility of attributing solely economic significance to the "free hand" in Ethiopia:

The Italian and French Governments, after examining the situation of Italy and France in East Africa, particularly with regard to the interests of Eritrea and Italian Somalia on the one hand, and the French Somali Coast on the other, and of the neighboring countries desiring to pursue the policy of friendly

cooperation that they are implementing in the vicinity of their African possessions; have agreed upon the following provisions. The French Government recognizes, as far as it is concerned, that, subject to the rights and interests belonging to Great Britain under the treaties and agreements in force, Italy has overriding interests throughout the territory of Ethiopia, with the exception of French economic interests relating to the operation of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway.

2) The French Government therefore undertakes, with respect to Italy—even in the event of changes to the status quo in the region in question—not to seek any advantages in Ethiopia other than those of an economic nature indicated above, and the Italian Government, in turn, undertakes to guarantee, under all circumstances, French economic interests relating to the operation of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa Railway.

3) The two Governments declare that, in agreeing to the above provisions, they were motivated by the desire to clarify the content of the agreements and treaties pertaining to the region in question, agreements and treaties which remain fully in force.

Based on this document and everything we have discussed, it seems clear to us that the Italian-French agreements of January 1935 had a very specific meaning for both parties: for Laval, they were intended to secure Italian support for France against Germany and recognition of the French system in Europe; for Mussolini, they were intended to secure for Italy the opportunity to expand into East Africa.

Fully aware of what was at stake for each side, the two parties did nothing but haggle as much as possible over their consent to each other's demands. France was by far the biggest winner, since although Mussolini was primarily interested in Ethiopia at that time, he could not underestimate the importance of French friendship in Europe or the risk—however unlikely—of being isolated between Paris and Berlin. From his own political perspective, however, Mussolini's gain was also quite substantial.

This—perhaps—explains why, in the very final phase of the negotiations, when Laval finally decided to give his consent to the Duce's colonial ambitions, Mussolini had to end up accepting another commitment—one that did not appear in the preparatory documents and would not appear in the final ones, but which was nonetheless agreed to in principle on that very occasion (even if, as we will see later, it was finalized in the following months): that of establishing close military cooperation between the two countries.

5. Mussolini and Europe.

Carmine Senise wrote in his memoirs that the January 1935 agreement with France was the political event Mussolini valued most during his time in office. At first glance, this assessment may seem excessive; in reality, it is highly likely that Bocchini's successor was not mistaken in making it.

For Mussolini, the agreement with Laval was not only the necessary prerequisite for the subsequent "conquest of the Empire," but—just as importantly—a "kind of endorsement that the regime received from a country with a long democratic tradition and the cradle of a revolution that had transformed the world" and, as such, "a mark of nobility conferred upon Fascism."

Of all the major Western countries, France had certainly been the one where Fascist Italy and Mussolini had been viewed for years—for nearly a decade—with the greatest suspicion, distrust, and hostility. For years in France, there had been very few fascists and, on closer inspection, very few pro-fascists as well, given that the formation of public opinion favorable to fascism had been hindered, on the one hand, by the presence of a strong left-wing movement—clearly anti-fascist and linked to the Italian anti-fascist émigré community—and, on the other hand, a widely held democratic sentiment in the country, and, yet again, an equally widespread hostility toward fascist "national" demands and Mussolini's claims to give Italy a new international standing—which manifested itself, depending on the case, as either a pacifist or a nationalist reaction.

Even on the right, fascism—with the exception of a few ardent anti-communists who reveled in the fact that fascism had crushed the communist revolution and restored social order—had not enjoyed genuine sympathy, both because it was considered too "revolutionary" and, above all, because it was viewed as a source of international disorder and a potential threat to European peace and to the French system and hegemony.

Leaving aside both staunch anti-fascists and the few open pro-fascists, it is significant that, when reviewing the literature of the 1920s devoted to Italy and fascism by those authors who sought to present themselves as impartial, any praise for the regime's work pertains only to certain aspects of domestic policy (order, public works, etc.) and, in any case, are never such as to influence the overall judgment.

On the one hand, in fact, this judgment is always shaped by a more or less explicit condemnation of the anti-democratic nature of the fascist regime—partially excused, at most, by the lack of a true democratic tradition and a genuine concept of freedom (hence the excesses that had led to the victory of fascism and then acquiescence to it) among a people still backward and "young" such as the Italian people—on the other hand, it is almost always accompanied by an even more explicit condemnation of what were almost unanimously considered Mussolini's bellicose nationalist objectives.

Two examples, among the many that could be cited, illustrate this attitude well.

According to Ludovic Naudeau, while it could be said that, domestically, fascism had been good for Italy—in the sense that it had brought discipline—it must also be noted that it had done so by stoking the nation's external ambitions and promising it a sort of entry into an earthly paradise; so that, for the time being, any judgment on Mussolini's regime could only be based on the direct and indirect dangers arising from this nationalistic over-excitement:

When unilateral and confined to Italy, fascism—a true culture of force—is a danger to neighboring democracies. The more it disciplines Italy, the more it disciplines it in a manner hostile to foreigners. When widespread throughout all of Europe, fascism will subjugate Western civilization to the most fanatical nationalism and condemn it to the fate of unbridled warmongering. Italy's internal order is reorganized solely in function of its external ambitions. It will attempt to realize these ambitions, whatever the cost….

And a broader, historical judgment would ultimately depend on its ability to realize these ambitions:

If Fascism one day achieves resounding victories and territorial gains, everything it will have done in preparation will seem the work of a genius. If, after various adventures, it drags the nation into one of those catastrophes with which fate sometimes loves to punish the presumptuous, everything it will have done since 1922 will be judged a farce.

And for Louis Roya, who judged the fascist regime far more harshly—no more and no less than the infamous regime in Warsaw—the problem presented itself in even sharper and more nationalistically apocalyptic terms:

If Napoleon became master of Italy and installed a King of Rome, Mussolini certainly hopes to extend an imperial hand over France and, sooner or later, send a proconsul or a ras to Paris. And it is equally to the four barbaric corners of Europe that the Fascist mission must reach as a force of renewal. Unless, of course, he prefers to come and settle in Paris himself, like Julian the Apostate.

Nor, after what we have seen in the preceding pages, can it certainly be said that this attitude of French public opinion and political forces had not found substantial reflection for years in the policies of the successive governments that had led France.

Poincaré, Briand, Herriot, Tardieu, Daladier, Paul-Boncour, and Barthou—even while having to reckon with the reality and daily necessities of international relations and even while having to yield to their demands— never concealed the fact that they regarded fascism as a political system that was different from and hostile to the democratic system they represented, nor did they hide their mistrust and fears regarding the unscrupulous manner in which Fascist Italy conducted itself on the international stage

and the risks inherent in the nationalistic character of its foreign policy.

Given these precedents, it is natural that—regardless of the developments it was expected to bring—the January 1935 agreement with France constituted for Mussolini a political success of the highest order: the end of fascism's isolation and of Italy's status as a minor power among the great powers. Indeed, it demonstrated that even French democracy—the most typical and, in its own way, the most uncompromising—had been forced to accept the need to collaborate as equals with Italian fascism, and even that Fascist Italy was not only an indispensable element of the European balance of power but also one to which one had to turn if one wished to guarantee that peace, that European system, that French security that, until then, it had been said France sought to shatter.

And this was all the more true because, while the Mussolini–Laval agreement had undoubtedly been dictated by political considerations and necessities—which, moreover, confirmed the prevalence of Fascist realism over democratic ideologism—it was part of a much broader context that, at first glance, might suggest its significance went beyond these considerations and necessities, political and therefore contingent—and was the first step toward a new approach by the democratic countries toward fascism.

An approach not dictated solely by political realism, but also resulting from a different way of assessing fascism: not a negative political system, not a political system acceptable only as long as it concerned Italy alone, but a political system that deserved attention and from which there was also much to learn.

If one views the issue from this perspective, there is no doubt that the agreement with Laval represented for Mussolini not only a major political success (which fully justifies Senise's assessment) but also the pinnacle of prestige and, in certain specific respects, even of the consensus achieved by fascism and Mussolini in Europe and around the world.

Just three months later, at Stresa, the shadow of increasingly strained Italian-Ethiopian relations would begin to dim the Duce's popularity and signal the start of a reversal in the trend toward viewing fascism in a different light. The invasion of Ethiopia would complete this process and restore the relationship between fascism and democracy to its traditional terms: on the one hand, ideological and moral opposition; on the other, realistic national political interests.

The fact remains, however, that during the period roughly spanning from the conclusion of the Four-Power Pact to that of the Mussolini-Laval agreement, Fascism may have given the impression of having succeeded in earning its place and respectability within the democratic world—not only at the level of realpolitik but also at a broader ideological-political level.

And this may help explain many things about which confusion still often arises or on which historically unfounded judgments are expressed; among other things, why the agreement with Fascist Italy was accepted not only by a large part of the French political class but also by broad sectors of public opinion across the Alps—which, until just a few years earlier, had held firmly democratic positions; why Mussolini was able, for a moment, to believe not only that he had won his battle on the diplomatic front (and, therefore, that he could accelerate his African policy), but also that he was on the verge of winning it in the realm of European public opinion (and, therefore, that he was correct when he asserted that Fascism was now the true protagonist and the future of the 20th century); and because during this period the figure of the Duce acquired, even outside Italy, a prestige he had never had before and would never have again, and, above all, aroused around himself an unparalleled interest and curiosity.

To offer a balanced explanation of the new way in which fascism was viewed in the Western world during this period, one must take into account a whole series of factors that are both distinct and interrelated.

To put it simply (a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this work and would require hundreds of pages), it is clear that, at the level of average (less politicized) public opinion, significant factors behind this shift were:

- time: more than ten years after coming to power, Fascism had become a familiar feature of the international landscape; events such as the Matteotti murder and the Corfu crisis, which had so deeply shaken public opinion, had—if not been forgotten—certainly been increasingly reduced to episodes on which time had taken its toll, aided, on the one hand, by the fact that such brutal and sensational events did not recur, and, on the other hand, by the proliferation worldwide of acts of violence—both individual and collective—which led to a blurring and leveling of individual responsibility, a sort of desensitization to them; at the same time, the consolidation of the regime and its endurance over time, on the one hand, led to a sort of process of legitimizing the regime itself, while on the other hand, they prompted people to seek to understand its reasons (significant in this regard is the proliferation in the late 1920s of news reports and books on Fascist Italy) and to identify them increasingly in two directions: the democratic immaturity of Italians, which led them to accept fascism and to be enthralled by Mussolini, and the material benefits achieved by the regime through its “social organization” of the country;

- the attitude of the democratic ruling class and the major media outlets: at the root of the increasingly conciliatory stance adopted by many European and American democratic circles toward Italy were undoubtedly very different motivations: for some, it was an objective necessity dictated by political and economic expediency—the same considerations that led them to abandon the hardline policy pursued in previous years toward the USSR, to maintain trade relations, and to reach agreements with it based precisely on political requirements and economic needs, without this implying a renunciation of their ideological positions; for others, it was a mere acceptance of a reality that, since it did not concern their own country or their own living conditions, was deemed not contrary to their interests and therefore objectively acceptable, while the consequences of any potential upheaval were unpredictable; for still others, it was a genuine admiration for fascism’s demonstrated ability to free Italy from the communist threat; equally undoubtedly, all these motivations (and other secondary ones we will not dwell on) were, however, perceived by the general public, blended together, and thus took on a cultural significance that—in today’s political language—can be defined as détente and peaceful coexistence; Nor, still within this context of cultural influences, can two specific sub-factors that helped complete this amalgamation be underestimated:

a) the influence that the Second Vatican Council had exerted in Catholic countries and communities, although it must be noted that the attitude of the ecclesiastical hierarchy—and especially of the clergy—toward fascism was very often different and more nuanced in those countries than in Italy;

b) the widely held belief—largely linked to the idea that Fascism was a typically Italian phenomenon, connected to the mentality and civil backwardness of Italians—that, in essence, one could believe Mussolini when he said that Fascism was not an export commodity;

- the direct and indirect influence of fascist propaganda: even though the organization of fascist propaganda abroad had not yet reached its peak during this period, there is no doubt that this, too, was

an important factor, especially in two areas—the Italian communities abroad (some of which—especially the one in the United States—had a significant influence on the political life of their respective countries) and that of certain opinion-forming newspapers (primarily British and American) over which, through their correspondents in Italy and diplomatic missions abroad, the regime managed to exert a certain influence; since this influence was generally neither too explicit nor continuous, it ultimately proved to be the most effective, if, in the first half of the 1930s, the image of Italy that began to circulate abroad was increasingly characterized by an emphasis on the regime's positive aspects and, in general, a discreet tone in addressing the negative ones (and, moreover, almost always with a more or less explicit reference to the Italians' civic immaturity), this was also due to this direct and indirect management of the international press;

- The rise of National Socialism in Germany: Hitler's victory, after an initial moment of uncertainty, worked entirely to the advantage of Fascism, both because, in a comparison of the two regimes, Mussolini's immediately appeared more humane, liberal, pacifist, and committed to preserving the European status quo than Hitler's (at the end of 1933, the Jewish press in the U.S. conducted an opinion poll to determine which leader had more effectively supported the civil and political rights of Jews: Mussolini was among the twelve chosen), and because the anti-German stance adopted by Mussolini—and especially his reaction to the Vienna Putsch—drew considerable sympathy and hope toward Italy. While this was certainly the result of fear, it equally certainly pushed many prejudices against fascism into the background and contributed significantly to the growing conviction that fascism was a force for international order rather than disorder.

These factors—and other minor ones that we will not dwell on here for the sake of brevity—all contributed, both individually and in combination, to fostering, to varying degrees, the emergence in broad sectors of mainstream Western public opinion during the first half of the 1930s of a new way of viewing and, consequently, judging fascism and Italy. To focus solely on these factors, however, would be entirely mistaken; it would present a distorted picture and, above all, prevent us from grasping the true historical significance of fascism's "success" during these years in Western society, as well as the difference between this particular "success" and the one it enjoyed—already during this period, but especially in the subsequent one—in certain circles of the countries of the Middle and Far East.

To grasp this significance, it is necessary to consider the consequences that the "Great Crisis" had in the West—not only, and ultimately not so much, at the economic level, but also and above all at the moral, cultural, and political levels. Only within this far broader and more dramatic context is it, in fact, possible to understand the underlying reasons for fascism's fleeting success during those years and to properly assess both the contribution of other factors and their capacity for expansion.

The close relationship linking the spread of fascism to the "Great Crisis" is too well known to warrant further discussion here.

The most obvious and striking example in this regard is the sudden and spectacular rise, from 1930 onward, of National Socialism and its rise to power in 1933 in Germany—the European country that was, in fact, most gripped by the crisis and where the historical, moral, and political conditions were most conducive and pronounced for the emergence of a fascist-style regime. However, we must not forget that during the same period, the most significant minor fascist movements also emerged in other European countries, or that some of the pre-existing authoritarian movements defined themselves in a more strictly fascist sense.

To limit ourselves to the major countries, it suffices to recall that in England the British Union of

Fascists was founded by O. Mosley in 1932 and that the first two genuine French fascist organizations —M. Bucard's Francisme and J. Renaud's Solidarité française (which would be followed two years later by J. Doriot's Parti populaire français)—were founded in 1934, The issue that interests us most here, however, is not that concerning these movements.

In terms of the "success" of Italian fascism, this proliferation of minor fascist parties is, in fact, a secondary aspect—one to which we will return, but which is certainly less important than others. Even more important—though still secondary—is another aspect: the admiration and approval that the economic policy implemented in Italy to address the crisis aroused in numerous democratic and liberal circles. Voices to this effect were heard almost everywhere, in Europe as well as in America, and not infrequently broadened the discussion from the individual measures implemented by the fascist government to corporatism, as the beginning of a new and more rational economic system.

As for the U.S., Diggins aptly summarized the sentiment from which these voices sprang:

In the 1930s, the corporatist state seemed like a hotbed of bustling industry. While America floundered, Italy's progress in shipping, aviation, hydroelectric construction, and public works offered an enticing example of direct action and national planning. Compared to the ineptitude with which President Hoover handled the economic crisis, the Italian dictator appeared to be a model of efficiency.

This explains why, in May 1932, a magazine like *Fortune* wrote:

In the global crisis marked by government confusion and uncertainty, Mussolini remains steadfast. He also embodies the virtues of strength and a centralized government that acts immediately and without opposition for the well-being of the entire nation.

It also explains why, two months later, the liberal and anti-fascist *Nation* went so far as to call for a Mussolini-like leader for the United States as well. Nor did this attitude change substantially after Roosevelt's election to the presidency.

There is no doubt that Roosevelt was a sincere democrat. For him at that time, Mussolini and Stalin were "blood brothers." This did not, however, prevent him from considering the Duce a "true gentleman," from keeping in touch with him, and from declaring himself "very interested and deeply impressed by what he has accomplished and by his proven, honest effort to renew Italy and to try to prevent serious upheavals in Europe."

And while the president viewed Fascist economic policy with curiosity and interest (especially

regarding social security), corporatism—particularly in the interventionist and planning-oriented interpretation given to it by Bottai—captured the attention of quite a few American scholars and experts during this period, including some of the top executives of the NRA, such as J. Farley (who, in 1933, upon returning from a study trip to Italy, wrote an enthusiastic report to Roosevelt on Mussolini's land reclamation projects) and his own boss, H. Johnson (who, upon leaving office, is said to have made explicit reference to Mussolini's "illustrious name").

A highly significant example of this interest is provided by the special issue on Italian corporatism published in 1934 by *Fortune*. In fact, it provides a good opportunity to understand both the nature and limits of American interest in corporatism, the reservations that the state of the Italian economy aroused across the Atlantic, and, finally, what those who claimed that "the corporative state is to Mussolini as the New Deal is to Roosevelt" actually meant.

Nor should one assume that admiration and support for Fascist economic policy were limited to the United States. Significant examples in the same vein can be found in France[6] and, above all, in England. And in England, this support was not limited to the right—among liberals and conservatives—but was also present among the Labour Party itself.

Typical in this regard are two interviews: one with Lloyd George in the *Manchester Guardian* of January 17, 1933, in which the veteran Liberal leader stated that Mussolini's corporatist state was "the greatest social reform of the modern era" and applauded the Fascist policy of returning to the land, since it was the only one that could solve the problem of unemployment; and the other with the leader of the Labour opposition, Landsbury, in the *News Chronicle* of February 16, 1933, in which, again on the subject of unemployment, he stated:

I can see only two methods, and these have already been pointed out by Mussolini: public works or subsidies. In my opinion, there is an enormous amount of work that can be done in agriculture and land reclamation, on roads, in communications, and in the mines… If I were a dictator, I would do as Mussolini does: that is, I would choose men who know how to draw up plans for public works that are truly useful to the country, and I would resolutely continue on my path until I had brought about a complete reorganization of national life."

Nor, however, should one believe that admiration for and support of Fascist economic policy were limited to politicians or technical experts seeking practical solutions to address the crisis.

Significant examples in the same vein can in fact also be found among intellectuals and pure scholars, not actively involved in political or economic management. A typical case is that of W. Sombart, who, at the end of 1932, declared:

One of the greatest merits of Fascism, in my view, lies in having completely transcended the concept of class struggle, and instead having embraced the wise balance between the principle of individual

initiative and free production and the principle of organization and corporatism, thereby avoiding, at the same time, the pitfall of a leveling, state-worshipping, Bolshevik-style centralization. If the last century was, for me, characterized by the primacy of the economy—whose capitalist hypertrophy gave rise to the Marxist myth of the absolute class struggle—I am convinced that the current century will be characterized by a new predominance of the political element over the economic element, not in an absolutist and all-encompassing sense, but in a sense, as I have said, rationalizing and regulated, as well as in the sense of linking the forces of the private economy to a higher plane of purposes, where they are not nullified but integrated: this is why I regard the new Italy and its remarkable creation of the corporative state with the admiration of a man and the attention of a scientist. It truly offers me an example of the first constructive achievement of the postwar period, one that cannot fail to serve as a milestone on the path that every other nation, striving for its own political and economic integration, will inevitably follow.

To truly understand the “success” of fascism in the first half of the 1930s, however, one must look above all to what has been defined as the crisis of democracy during this period.

The most evident manifestations of this crisis today appear to have been those of an immediately political nature: the decline, under the blows of the economic crisis, of the revolutionary momentum and the capacity for reaction of the labor movement and the left as a whole (which in some countries also resulted in a veritable electoral collapse: a striking example in this regard was the case of the British Labour Party, which fell from 259 seats in 1929 to 46 in 1931, only to recover to 154 by November 1935), the emergence within the socialist movement of tendencies objectively alien to its traditions and its class-based lines of development (one need only think of the French neo-socialism of Déat, Marquet, and Renaudel, and H. de Man’s “planism”), the defection of a large portion of the petty- and middle-class members and voters from the left-wing parties—initially to take positions supporting governments that pursued deflationary policies and, subsequently, to orient themselves more or less explicitly toward fascist-style solutions, the division between the employed and the unemployed and their respective tendencies to align themselves politically in different ways; and, finally, the radicalization of political positions, to the advantage above all of the extremes.

Without in any way wishing to downplay the importance of the political aspect of the crisis, we must not forget another aspect of it—the moral one—which is equally, and perhaps even more, important, because—in general—it had a much broader scope, since it affected not only various sectors of the left, a large part of liberalism and classical democracy and had a major influence on the general public opinion of the time; and because—in particular—it is precisely this aspect that allows us to truly understand the connection between the crisis of democracy and the temporary “success” of fascism in the West.

In a famous book of the time, *Democracy in Crisis* by H. J. Laski, one reads statements such as these:

The general mood of the world is one of profound and widespread disillusionment. It seems that our generation has lost its scale of values. Certainly, cynicism has replaced it, just as hope has given way to

despair… The institutions that, a generation ago, were rarely questioned… are now subjected to such bitter and hostile criticism that they are constantly on the defensive. Our desires seem to be gripped by a feverish haste, a carelessness, and a lack of calm, which reveals our ignorance of what we should be seeking in life. The spirit of negation has prevailed over the spirit of affirmation.

And that's not all. The foundations of our civilization are facing criticism on a scale not seen since the time when Rousseau burst onto the scene of the astonished eighteenth century. None of our prophets are of his stature, but most resemble him in their furious rejection of the existing order and in their romantic yearning for the principles of a new equilibrium… The Western way of life is in the crucible of trial… The lack of respect for authority is not due to some sudden outburst of enthusiasm for anarchy; it is rooted in the loss of faith in the principles upon which authority had been organized in capitalist society…

This crisis of values—which, in a certain sense, had already been latent but was precipitated by the Great Depression and, in particular, by the insecurity and despair it caused—would, over the medium term, lead to a political resurgence of the communist parties (especially through the formula of popular fronts) and would find a response, particularly at the ideological-political level, even within the democratic, liberal, and conservative forces, primarily through the contribution of the younger generations. In the short term, however, it very often took the form of a search for corrective measures and systemic changes that affected all spheres—particularly that of the capitalist economy—without leaving even the political sphere itself unscathed.

While common to nearly all Western countries, this phenomenon was particularly significant in France and found widespread coverage in the major news media, thanks to which the issue of the crisis of capitalism and democracy was disseminated—often broken down and reduced to extremely simplified formulas and crude generalizations—across all levels of public opinion, contributing significantly to increasing confusion and, what interests us most here, to place the discourse on fascism in a new and largely distorted perspective, even compared to how it was formulated on an ethical and cultural level by the most serious and informed groups within the "culture of crisis" itself.

The French aspect of the "culture of crisis" has been extensively studied both in its most significant specific manifestations and as a whole.

Fundamental to this latter point is J. L. Loubet Del Bayle's research on the "nonconformists" of the first half of the 1930s.

These studies clearly show how this culture, by calling everything into question—from the capitalist structure of society to the political system, to the values that until then had, for better or worse, formed the basis of Western society, to the very structure of the international order and France's position in Europe—came to speak of a "total crisis of civilization" and, seeking to combat the causes of the "established disorder" of contemporary society—namely, "the obtuse selfishness of the bourgeois and liberal world," "economic and spiritual materialism," and "the impotence of a politics without spirit or soul," it ultimately came to advocate the need for a "third way" between capitalism and communism

and, in some cases, between the right and the left—and thus found itself, or gave the impression of being, on a path not unlike that of fascism.

Few examples can better illustrate this position. On the international stage, the “culture of crisis” was critical of the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, internationalism, and pacifism. On the political front, its criticism and distrust were directed against political parties, parliamentarism, and liberal democracy, all of which were accused of being corrupt and distorted by the workings of capitalism. As Loubet Del Bayle wrote:

For everyone, parliamentary democracy had become synonymous with lies, weakness, mediocrity, compromise, and baseness.

From *Ordre nouveau* (February ’34):

There is no longer any politics; there are only politicians—six hundred windbags, some reckless, others too malicious, but always powerless. Electing a representative today all too often means granting parliamentary immunity to an exploiter, a fence, or a dangerous imbecile.

For “Esprit” (March ’33):

There is no longer a city, no longer a state, no longer a government. The powers of money have invaded the entire system. An immense parasite is upon the nations, paralyzing their parliaments, their media, their will, and irresistibly poisoning their hearts.

By E. Mounier in *L’aube* on February 27, ’34:

The ideology we are fighting is the ideology of ’89… This is what we are fighting: the individual stripped of all substance and all carnal and spiritual ties, built on resentments and demands, regarded as an absolute; freedom regarded as an end in itself, unrelated to what it seeks to achieve, to the point of

judging choices themselves and loyalty as impurities; equality among neutral and interchangeable individuals (according to which the proletariat is merely a footnote to the citizen); political and economic liberalism that devours itself, the devout optimism of national sovereignty; purely negative opposition to socialism; attachment to an abstract and deceitful form of parliamentarism that, moreover, discredits itself day by day.

Such a democracy fails to recognize both the originality and the fullness of the person and the organic community that must unite people: the history of the last 150 years bears witness to this. Capitalist freedom has abandoned democracy, using its formulas and weapons, into the hands of the oligarchy of the rich… The political state does not revolve around individuals or parties, but around the masses of undifferentiated, weary “free” people who vote haphazardly, spontaneously submitting themselves to the rule of capitalist powers which, through the press and Parliament, maintain the cycle of this subjugation.

Even harsher criticisms were leveled against the capitalist system. On this point, all the voices of the “nonconformists” were unanimous; “Jeune Droit,” “Reaction pour l’ordre,” the “Revue ancale,” “Ordre nouveau,” “Esprit,” and “L’aube” made anti-capitalism the centerpiece of their philosophical and moral discourse even before their economic and political one; thus, Mounier was certainly not wrong when, in 1936, in his *Manifeste au service du personnalisme*, he wrote: “History will undoubtedly point to anti-capitalism as the most successful cliché of the 1930s.” Typical in this regard is the position of *Esprit*, which Loubet Del Bayle summarized as follows:

Anti-capitalism was expressed in these journals in a particularly aggressive and violent manner. For *Esprit*, it was the foundation of its denunciation of the established order. The capitalist system seemed to it, in fact, to meet all the criteria that Catholic morality considers necessary to define tyranny: “In the capitalist system,” Mounier wrote, “we know the cause of crises and wars, of corruption, of strikes, and of hatred. The question no longer arises for us as to whether the system meets the definition of tyranny. Rather, we must distinguish whether a tyrant wields power so universal in crushing people through poverty or war, from one end of the earth to the other, that the tyrant has accumulated, in the silence of normality, so many ruins and so many injustices.”

And in conclusion, after noting that “a regime such as modern capitalism is a kind of social sin”: “Our revolt against the world of 1932 implies the condemnation and overthrow, by all means—especially illegal ones, that is, effective ones—of the current capitalist regime.”

As we can see, the positions of *Esprit* left no room for misunderstanding.

Hence a state of mind, a revolutionary fervor that J.-P. Maxence—a typical representative of this culture of the first half of the 1930s—aptly recalled in his *Histoire de dix ans*:

Faced with a disheartened, powerless political world; faced with a society that generates injustices through its very institutions; faced with capitalism on the brink of crisis; faced with an art, literature that were lost in dead-end analysis or futile gestures, faced with the almost universal loss of the meaning of humanity and its destiny—on the threshold of 1931, on both the levels of doctrine and action, a consciousness and a revolutionary will were born. The different paths, the opposing revolutions, the battles waged, the insults exchanged—none of this should make us forget: by the end of 1930, he was not a complacent spirit, nor a free man who accepted the world as it was, nor one who did not wish
to change it through an "effective and profound revolution."

Hence, once again, a great interest in the Italian, Soviet, and German experiences—often placed on the same level as distinct aspects, due to historical and environmental differences, "the break with the old world and the search for a new order"—as great revolutions, as important as the French Revolution, through which an attempt had been made to create a new humanity, a new political and social framework, and a new overall attitude toward life.

This keen interest did not imply that these revolutions were viewed as models to be imitated, but it certainly led, during this period, to the "culture of crisis," especially in its most prominent youth movements, to view Soviet Russia, Fascist Italy, and National Socialist Germany with fresh eyes—not without sympathy, admiration, and envy—if only because these regimes had enshrined the failure and condemnation of whatever stood in opposition to the "true revolution."

This explains, on the one hand, the serious accusations of fascism leveled against it by the Communists (even *Izvestia* took a stand against the *Politique de la personne*, calling D. de Rougemont "one of the leaders of the French fascist vanguard") and, on the other hand, why a certain number of its exponents (generally among the less significant ones) eventually adopted positions that were effectively pro-fascist and collaborationist.

Overall, the best part of the "culture of crisis"—despite its interest in fascism (which in May 1935 manifested itself, among other things, in the participation of various "nonconformists" in a congress on corporatist institutions organized in Rome by the PNF) and its tendency, to quote R. Aron, to reject both "an attitude of adherence" and "a purely critical and disdainful attitude" toward it—not only did it voice a whole series of criticisms of fascism from the very beginning (accusing it, among other things, of being a new form of materialism, statism, narrow-minded nationalism, and above all of failing to "thoroughly reexamine the very dimensions of capitalism: the primacy of profit, the fertility of money, the power of the economic oligarchy"), but it also ended up quite early on explicitly condemning it and turning toward entirely different solutions.

That said, it must be equally clearly stated that this argument applies essentially at the cultural level—the very level at which the struggle of the "nonconformists" and much of the "culture of crisis"

generally took place. The picture changes, however, when one considers the repercussions and echoes that the themes raised by these intellectuals had on mainstream public opinion, as mediated by political commentary and the news media.

At these levels, in fact, there is no doubt that the “culture of crisis” in general—and its stances on fascism and the revolutions of the 20th century in particular—played an objectively pro-fascist role, contributing significantly to the emergence of a sort of “political culture” that was in reality a mélange of moods, clichés, frustrations, and wishful thinking, in which the most diverse and contradictory ideas and demands converged.

This occurred primarily in two ways: by endorsing fascist institutions through its own accusations and condemnations of democracy and its institutions, and by legitimizing the image of a fundamentally anti-capitalist fascism—and, in doing so, helping to morally and ideologically disarm significant segments of Western public opinion (as well as those in countries ideologically dependent on Europe, such as Latin American nations) with regard to fascism: through the popularization of the concept of the “culture of crisis,” this, in fact, emerged as one of the great attempts of the contemporary era to renew humanity and society; an attempt that has not yet succeeded, but which is nonetheless capable of improvement and refinement and, in any case, aligns with the path of progress and human emancipation and, in essence, is neither better nor worse than others.

An attempt, therefore, which, at best, should not have led democratic countries to adopt it as their own, but which for that reason alone should not be condemned outright and, indeed, should in practice be accepted as a de facto reality; all the more so because only by realizing that, “in the current state of the world, the standardization of political constitutions is a utopia,” was it possible to achieve that collaboration among all nations—democratic, fascist, communist—which alone could ensure a minimum of peace and prosperity for all.

An attempt that, not infrequently, was not only accepted and often justified in the case of Italy (just as communism was for Russia and National Socialism for Germany), but was also framed within a completely distorted and extremely dangerous perspective: namely, that only a dictatorship could provide the authority necessary to deal with crisis situations and, in this sense, constituted a sort of historical necessity. Indicative of this is the large number of articles, statements, and books published during those years in virtually every country that addressed the issue of dictatorship and chronicled the deeds of various dictators, from antiquity to modern times, to the point of making them—whether consciously or not, it matters little—a sort of common thread running through the history of nations.

On a cultural level, so to speak, a good example is what Jacques Bainville of the Académie française wrote in 1935 in the introduction to his *Les dictateurs*, a broad overview for the general public that spanned from Solon to Caesar, from Cromwell to Napoleon, from Bolívar to Lenin, Stalin, and Atatürk, and from Mussolini to Hitler:

Contemporary dictators appeared the very next day after President Wilson had said, “Make the world safe for democracy”… When the first dictator appeared, people were incredulous. He was barely granted a few days in power, and in France, a politician had the imprudence to refer to him, from the podium, as a “Carnival Caesar.” Then, as the trend spread, people took comfort in thinking that, if there were an epidemic, it would stop at the gates of the great nations—those with a liberal tradition and well-organized left-wing parties. Yet people were not unaware of what inflation and a weakened

currency entailed; these were simply regarded as a scourge reserved for poor, primitive, or very poorly administered countries.

It was unthinkable that wealthy countries, equipped with a sound financial system, could be struck by this sort of “hospital gangrene.”

All of this has proven false. The currency has fallen ill even where it was reputed to defy all challenges. Dictatorships have arisen in places where they were once considered unthinkable. They have firmly established themselves at a time when, for quite some time, the dictators—when they were still mere agitators—had not even been taken seriously.

Moreover, it is no coincidence that we associate monetary turmoil with the establishment of authoritarian regimes. One often precedes and gives rise to the other because, for the masses, it is the most palpable symptom of disorder.

And this is also one of the reasons why dictatorship has no uniform causes.

It can be a defensive reaction against anarchy and ruin and against the effects of democracy taken to its ultimate consequences, which are socialism or communism. Conversely, it can be, for egalitarian and anti-capitalist democracy, the means to overcome the forces that resist it and to assert itself.

There are, therefore, different kinds of dictatorships. There is something for everyone and a little something for every taste.

Those who reject the idea with horror would adapt to it very well and, often, set out on its path without realizing it. Those who desire it as such would be very disappointed if it were to triumph.

Whether one calls for it or detests it, it is therefore essential to understand it in the various forms it has taken throughout history, and then, in our own time, in countries so numerous and geographically distant from one another that it would likely be a mistake to view it merely as a sort of fad, when in fact it is the result of a law or a necessity.

Such a discourse reveals an entire way of understanding the reality of the “Great Crisis” and how to respond to it. Coming from the pen of a man of letters—and, moreover, a conservative one—one might be tempted to consider it an episodic, marginal phenomenon. In reality, discourses of this kind were far from rare in those years, and even democratic politicians often thought along very similar lines.

Among the various examples that could be cited, one seems perhaps the most typical, since it allows us to immediately establish a clear correlation between these statements and those of the fascists. In the *Petit Journal* of March 11, 1933, Maurice Colrat, former Minister of Justice under Herriot, stated in no uncertain terms:

After Mussolini, Stalin, Mustafa Kemal, Pilsudski, and Hitler, now President Roosevelt is demanding the full powers of a dictator. One need only glance at this to realize that dictatorship takes various forms; but no one can deny that authority is necessary in any case. This need is evident even in republican and democratic countries. Dictatorship has republican and democratic origins.

These are words that could prompt many reflections; best of all, however, is a simple comparison with what Mussolini wrote in *Popolo d’Italia* on June 28 of that same year:

The U.S. Congress… has granted full powers to Roosevelt. These are truly full—indeed, the fullest possible—powers. The President’s rule is a dictatorship. The curious thing about all this is that the very same advocates of the democratic regime find that the current, utterly dictatorial development of American politics is part of the inevitable order of things… It is not fascism; for now, it is simply a negation of the system—not merely the political one… Millions of people are asking themselves: what good are immortal principles if, in times of crisis, they prove insufficient?

Nor, to gain a comprehensive picture of how Italy and fascism were viewed in this climate, can we underestimate statements such as the following, which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* in July 1933 and was written by Lord Ponsonby, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the first MacDonald government and a Labor leader in the House of Lords:

We shun the idea of a dictatorship, and in any case we have no one who could fill the office of dictator. But secretly we envy the methods of dictatorship when we see how energetically it functions

elsewhere. Countries ruled by dictatorships may not do what we want, but they act, they move forward, they transform themselves, they attempt new experiments, while we are mired in a quagmire and clinging to an antiquated system, which, if it fails, can lead to disaster. It took a year to rebuild a large part of Rome, and it took us three years to fail to build two new bridges in London.

It is within this context we have outlined that one must situate the personal "fortune," prestige, success, interest, and curiosity that Mussolini enjoyed during these years. A "fortune" that in the first half of the 1930s was probably unparalleled, but which can be well explained if, in addition to this context, two other elements are taken into account: the desire for peace among the masses and, above all, the man's personality.

Of these two elements, the first was certainly not only the most fleeting but also the one that ultimately played the smallest role as a component of his "fortune," whereas it proved decisive in bringing about its collapse when, with the invasion of Ethiopia, it became clear that Mussolini was by no means a pacifist but, at best, an unscrupulous politician who did not want a European conflict only because he was incapable of waging one and who, in any case, posed a threat to peace by his very presence—if only because he weakened the anti-German front and, whether he meant to or not, gave Hitler the opportunity to exploit the openings created by this weakening.

That said, the fact remains that in the first half of the 1930s—and particularly in 1933 and 1934—Mussolini's "fortune" in the world, and especially in Europe, was to some extent aided by the spread of the idea that, while he was not exactly the "prince of peace," he was nonetheless an important factor in preserving peace, a responsible statesman, concerned about the threats looming over it (see the Four-Power Pact), determined to rein in those who sought to disrupt it (see his stance during the Vienna Putsch), and ready, for this purpose, to find a resolution even to long-standing and difficult disputes between Italy and the other peaceful powers (see the agreement with France).

Thus, relatively few people clearly countered this optimistic view of Mussolini's politics in 1933–34. Among them, at the forefront were the Italian anti-fascists and the communists. All of their political and propaganda efforts were, in fact, aimed at denouncing the dangers to peace inherent in fascist politics and ideology, at highlighting the fundamental affinity between fascism and National Socialism, the instrumental nature of Mussolini's initiatives, the errors in judgment, the misinformation about the Italian reality, the short-sighted conservatism, and the narrow-minded anti-communism that lay at the root of this optimistic view.

Paradoxically, however, in terms of mainstream public opinion, this ended up benefiting rather than harming fascism. This campaign—and in particular the one promoted by the Communists—in fact, on the one hand, allowed Fascism to counter it with the argument that these were unfounded and worthless accusations, since they were leveled by a priori enemies of the regime and of Mussolini for whom nothing they did was acceptable; and on the other hand, it led many of those who were frightened, even more so than by international prospects, the economic situation, and workers' unrest, to view the denunciations and warnings of the anti-fascist parties as motivated by entirely different reasons: not by sincere concern for the fate of peace, but by the desire to fight by any means necessary against a political solution that seemed the most effective way to prevent the spread of communism in Europe.

This was all the more true because the numerous statements of appreciation for fascism's anti-communist actions—which, during this period of severe social tension, were being made by conservatives in virtually every country—indirectly lent credence to this kind of dismissal of the anti-fascist parties' arguments against Mussolini's peace policy. Consequently, it was not uncommon for even some of those who followed Fascist politics most closely—and who did not place excessive trust in Mussolini's genuine pacifism—to end up convinced, or at least to hope, that, ultimately, the Duce's realism was a guarantee of peace; that he wished to derive the maximum benefit from the favorable situation in which he found himself without, however, taking reckless steps—that is, without going beyond a certain limit; and so, if one was willing to pay the price, one could count on his non-hostility and perhaps even his support.

Typical in this regard is what E. Schreiber wrote in 1932:

Abroad, the Duce appears in a rather unsettling light due to his contradictory statements, at times pacifist and at times bellicose. Nevertheless, Mussolini has, so far, kept the doors of Janus's temple closed. As difficult as it is to predict the future, I am not far from believing that, in the event of a new European conflict, he aspires far more to secure significant territorial gains for his people in exchange for his neutrality than to drag them into a war whose outcome could be disastrous and, in any case, uncertain.

To complete the picture, another fact must not be underestimated.

In the first half of the 1930s, Hitler was universally regarded as the true threat to peace. Mussolini himself was not considered truly dangerous. After the Vienna Putsch, Italy's stance toward Germany, its rapprochement with France, and the vehement positions taken by the fascist press and Mussolini himself against National Socialism led many to regard as unfounded the fears that had initially been harbored regarding an Italian-German alliance and contributed to many viewing the Duce in a new light: not as a warmonger, nor as an abstract pacifist, but as a realist who was able to reconcile the interests of his own country with those of that segment of the European community concerned about the dangers to which peace was exposed by Hitler's policies.

Although the proposal was put forward by a few Hungarians from the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the Elizabethan University of Pécs, it is significant that, in this climate, there were even those who floated the idea of nominating Mussolini for the Nobel Peace Prize.

To understand Mussolini's personal "fortune" during these years, however, it is necessary to focus above all on how, within the context we have outlined, the Duce's personality played a role—especially in terms of mainstream public opinion, but also in certain socially and culturally influential circles—namely, how it was presented and perceived in the Western or Westernized world not only and not so much by fascist propaganda and outright pro-fascists, but by newspapers, groups of intellectuals, and segments of public opinion that were not truly pro-fascist (and, above all, would not have accepted fascism in their own countries) but who, in the particular climate of the moment—characterized by widespread discontent with the state of Western society and an equally widespread sense of uncertainty

and fear regarding its possible developments, by a whole series of more or less populist and more or less authoritarian myths, and by widespread criticism of the economy, politics, institutions, the ruling classes, and the very conception of life that had been dominant until then—they regarded Mussolini as one of the most characteristic expressions (for better or for worse) of the new European reality: a figure who was, in more ways than one, colorful but, precisely for this reason, different from the classic cliché of the traditional politician and, therefore, full of interest and, above all, capable of being viewed from the most varied perspectives, capable of evoking the most diverse "cultural" associations, depending on the various nations and social circles, and—given the diversity and pragmatic, demagogic-realistic nature of his stances—to be taken as a characteristic example of a new type of politician who was multiplying throughout the world and with whom, therefore, whether one accepted him or not, one had to reckon, understand, and measure oneself against.

Above all, this was a type of person who, in the journalistic sphere, offered endless material, aroused curiosity and conflicting passions that could be relied upon with certainty, and who lent himself very well not only to ensuring the success of initiatives centered on his name but also to indirectly presenting conservative solutions and formulas to the public in a non-committal and often "moderate" manner, that is, in a way that could be accepted within a formally democratic context or one distinct from that of the fascist institutions.

In attempting to outline an analysis of this particular aspect of Mussolini's success, it is of relatively secondary importance to discuss government officials or the highest echelons of the political class. On the one hand, in fact, it is natural that right-wing politicians would view Mussolini with interest and at times publicly praise him.

Even if they did not fully share his policies or sought to give their own policies a certain degree of autonomy from those of Italy or to adapt the fascist model to the realities of their own countries, it is more than understandable that a Dollfuss or a Gombos would consider Mussolini a politician worth emulating and would publicly express respect and admiration for him; just as it is logical that General Primo de Rivera went so far as to consult him for an opinion on the draft of the new constitution he wished to introduce in Spain, or that General Chiang Kai-shek declared himself a sincere admirer of Mussolini.

On the other hand, likewise, one certainly cannot be surprised or scandalized by the fact that politicians from democratic countries—even those with long-standing democracies—expressed positive opinions, both publicly and privately, about Mussolini's policies and the "Duce's" personality itself: even setting aside diplomatic courtesy and the belief that, in certain circumstances, some personal praise might be quite effective in winning the Duce's favor, it would be naive to think that, in the climate of the first half of the 1930s, a segment of the Western political class—especially at the governmental level—did not view Mussolini with interest. Even setting aside the fact that this class was often not immune to the widespread atmosphere of moral, cultural, and political crisis that characterized this period—and that its democratic sensibilities were at times clouded by the urgent need to seek solutions and even expedients to strengthen its own moral and material authority and to confront the economic and political crisis that was putting such a severe strain on all European countries and quite a few non-European ones (not to mention the European balance of power), one must realize that this interest was largely driven by the desire to understand and assess the reasons for the success that fascism seemed to be enjoying at that time and the actual value of its "response" to what appeared to be the underlying ills of Western society.

This, however, does not mean that, in general, such interest—even if it could take on the character of a

technical consensus regarding individual aspects of Mussolini's policies—entailed a repudiation of one's own democratic convictions, or that certain praises and acknowledgments directed at Mussolini himself can be understood in a context other than that determined, as we have said and repeated, by the idea—particularly prevalent in those years—that Fascism was a phenomenon unique to Italy, or by the conviction or hope that the Duce constituted an important element, if not of the status quo itself, then of the European balance of power.

More significant—though more difficult—for the purposes of our analysis is, if anything, to try to determine the role that certain positions taken by some prominent intellectuals played in Mussolini's "fortune" during this period.

A list of pro-fascist and pro-Mussolini statements, in this case, would be of little significance. What matters historically is not so much identifying the personal attitudes of certain European and American intellectuals toward fascism and Mussolini's personality, but rather trying to grasp what was unique at the root of this attitude—that is, the meaning that a segment of the Western intellectual world attributed to fascism and its Duce during those years.

Only in this way is it possible to trace, from a collection of individual cases, a stance that is as common as possible; that is, an attitude which, on the one hand, made explicit and radicalized what was latent and confused in other circles and, on the other hand, influenced to some extent a certain type of political commentary and a certain kind of "opinion-based" journalism—which were, in turn, the very ones that most effectively influenced the general public; and, quite often, by reducing fascism to a personal level, so that it became practically identified with Mussolini, and the Duce, in turn, took on an almost eponymous significance and, therefore, a dimension—for better or for worse (though during this period more for the better than for the worse)— disproportionate, arousing often ridiculous and morbid curiosity, absurd historical parallels, and grotesque "heroic" images that had nothing to do with reality, but which, on closer inspection, constituted one of the essential elements upon which the myth—the "fame"—of Mussolini was founded abroad.

A first point to clarify regarding the attitude of these intellectuals is their stance toward communism. It is certain that an anti-communist motivation played a role; while this contributed significantly to the spread of certain of their theses, it is not sufficient on its own to explain their attitude toward fascism.

Among these intellectuals, in fact, the classic right-left dichotomy held little sway, and it was not uncommon for fascism to be viewed as something that transcended this dichotomy. Certainly, many, when forced to choose, preferred fascism to communism, but often almost reluctantly.

Eliot's position can be considered typical:

I confess that in practice I prefer fascism… and I will never admit that this preference is entirely irrational. I believe that the form of irrationality found in fascism is closer to my own than that of the communists, but my form of irrationality is a reasonable one.

Nevertheless, Eliot regarded fascism as “an Italian regime, made for Italians, a product of the Italian mentality,” unsuitable for England, for which, instead, a “Torism” was appropriate—one that had “not only its own doctrine on the relationship between temporal and spiritual affairs in the Church and the State… but also a religious foundation upon which its political philosophy rested.”

Given that Eliot was a devout Catholic, there is room for misunderstanding as to what this religious foundation was supposed to be. A similar concept, however, is found among many of these intellectuals. After the fall of fascism, Santayana summarized his personal position as follows:

Of course, I have never been a fascist in the sense of belonging to the Italian party or to any other nationalistic or religious party. But viewed—as a naturalist must view it—as a product of the evolving social order, a nationalistic or religious institution will likely have its good sides and may perhaps be better than the alternative that may present itself at a given time and in a given place. This is what I thought—and still think—Mussolini’s dictatorship was for Italy’s domestic politics, in contrast to the disorderly socialism that preceded it and the impotent partisan chaos that followed it… But Mussolini, personally, was a villain, and Italy was a politically backward entity; and the militant foreign policy adopted by fascism was disastrous in its artificiality and madness. However, domestically, as long as that foreign policy and its mad hopes had not yet been adopted, Italy was a stronger, happier, and more united country than it is today or than it had ever been. Dictatorships are surgical operations, but some illnesses require them. The only thing is that the surgeon must be an expert, not an adventurer.

Here, as we can see, Eliot’s religious foundation takes on a broader meaning for Santayana; one might say it becomes secularized. And it is precisely this that can help us understand what is perhaps the most essential and unifying element of the positions held by many intellectuals abroad who, during the period in question, adopted a pro-fascist stance or were, at the very least, open to fascism.

The influence that fascism and Mussolini’s personality exerted on them can in fact be explained above all by this quest, by this aspiration toward a religious foundation for life and politics.

Amid the crisis of values that seemed to attack, corrupt, and overwhelm everything, fascism presented itself to these intellectuals as a moral response to this crisis—as something that gave individual and collective life meaning and, above all, values (for some, by restoring traditional ones; for others, by seeking new ones better suited to modern society)—and that rebuilt civic unity and a collective, joyful sense of belonging.

And contributing to the appreciation for this moral response—depending on the personalities of the intellectuals in question—were the most diverse motivations and influences and, above all, a moralistic radicalism that rarely took on genuinely political characteristics (such as explicit adherence to fascism) but rather was generally directed against the real or perceived ills of society that we have already seen at the center of the “culture of crisis” debate.

For some (very often those who would actually become fascists), the motivations were principled and of an ideological-cultural nature (rejection of progress, the conviction that Western civilization was

irretrievably in decline, skepticism regarding the “natural” goodness of man, contempt for ideologies, etc.). For most, however, they were of a different nature, more closely tied to the specific moment of crisis, the controversies it sparked, and the solutions for overcoming it.

For some, the motivation was anti-bourgeois. The bourgeois spirit had by then withered away and turned into conformism, selfishness, and hypocrisy: Fascism was anti-bourgeois and, above all, had the courage to do and theorize what others did while being ashamed of it and trying to hide it.

Typical in this regard are the positions of Shaw or Chesterton.

According to the latter, “Mussolini openly does what enlightened liberal governments do in secret… and justifies what they do but do not defend. They hide; they do the same things because they believe them to be expedient, but they do not defend them because they believe them to be untenable. Mussolini acts in accordance with his fascist principles; they, on the other hand, act against their own principles of freedom.”

And for Shaw, with his usual penchant for paradox:

One would think that our oligarchic ministries have never suspended habeas corpus or suppressed a newspaper or persecuted a Cobbett or a Kirkwood.

It seems that the British oligarch is permitted to steal a horse, while the Italian dictator is not permitted to guard his own hedge. Yet the only visible difference between the British oligarchy and the Italian dictator is that the former tramples on constitutional rights to ensure the dominance of its own class, while the latter does so to ensure that public services are conducted diligently for the public good.

For others, it was an anti-capitalist motivation. This was the case, for example, with Drieu La Rochelle —who at that time was not yet a fascist—for whom “fascism creates… a transitional civilization in which capitalism, understood in the form it took during its greatest prosperity, is rapidly led to destruction”; and also with Shaw, who as early as 1927 wrote:

Some of the things Mussolini has done—and others he threatens to do—go further in the direction of socialism than the British Labour Party would dare to go if it came to power. Those actions will sooner or later lead Mussolini into a serious conflict with capitalism, and it is certainly not my business—nor that of any socialist—to weaken him in anticipation of that conflict.

The most compelling argument, however, stemmed from the combination of two ideas: that fascism knew what it wanted and, despite its limitations, was therefore a valid—albeit imperfect—response, in its own way, to the crisis of Western society, and that it was particularly effective where other regimes either no longer seemed to be (the liberal-democratic ones) or seemed too barbaric and oppressive or too alien to Western tradition (the communist one).

Typical of the first of these two ideas is Hamilton's interpretation of Wells:

According to H. G. Wells, it had "something more enduring than could be found in most of the regimes that had replaced parliamentary systems" Its intellectual content was "limited, nationalistic, and romantic"; Mussolini's early methods were deplorable, but "the regime arose not as a personal usurpation but as the expression of an organization with its own purpose and doctrine," "it emphasized discipline and public service among its members." It presented itself as a counter-movement to chaotic communism, but its support for the Church and the still-existing monarchy was tempered by considerable courage in managing education and private property for the benefit of the community. Fascism, in reality, was not all bad. It was a good thing done poorly, and Mussolini left his mark on history."

The regime's public works—the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes, the urban transformation projects, and the restoration of classical monuments in Rome—seemed to be irrefutable proof of fascism's effectiveness. And then, above all, there was Italy's "concrete industriousness," its "order," and its "dignity." All things that, in the eyes of these intellectuals, were no longer to be found in other countries and which, on balance, made the more "questionable" and "negative" aspects of Fascism seem secondary. In those countries, to quote Lacretelle, "by fleeing from difficulties, freedom has become tied to personal interest and indolence"; people—young people above all—cared only about their daily existence and their own particular interests; they lacked ideals, sensitivity, civic values, and both physical and moral energy; even the proletariat, on which the left had pinned its hopes, was not immune to this crisis.

"There are only the exploiters and the exploited," Céline wrote in 1935, "and the victim of exploitation wants only to exploit in turn—it is the only thing he understands. The heroic myth of the proletariat does not exist; it is merely an empty dream. The proletarian is a failed bourgeois."

European literature of those years—and especially French literature—is full of observations of this kind. Hence an interest in, and sympathy for, Fascist Italy, whose reality seemed to these intellectuals to be moving in the opposite direction, toward the restoration of old values and the discovery of new ones capable of giving collective meaning to the life of a people and of creating a new type of social hierarchy capable of avoiding bourgeois individualism and communist collectivism, while at the same time ensuring a renewed, conscious participation of the masses in the life of the state. An interest and sympathy—it should be noted—that at this time even extended to men who were sincerely democratic and who would never have approved of fascism.

In discussing the case of one such figure, Jules Romains, Hamilton has provided an example of just how broad and varied the range of motivations behind this interest and sympathy was, and of how, when judging certain positions regarding fascism in the first half of the 1930s, one must be very careful not to fall into generalizations that are not only unjust but also dangerously distorting from the perspective of an effective historical understanding.

A staunch pacifist and resolute anti-fascist (at the 1933 PEN Club congress, he called for the expulsion of National Socialist delegates), Jules Romains, when the National Socialists came to power, overcame his revulsion for Hitler and published a series of articles in which he told the French that, at such a moment of crisis, democracy had much to learn from fascism.

“We will not allow a natural aversion to the outward appearances and to many of the objectives of the fascist revolution in Italy and Germany to prevent us from realizing that it is not merely a return to the past, a wholly negative episode of regression and weariness, but is also an attempt to find a possible solution to modern problems—precisely those problems that Marxism has ignored or ridiculed.”

According to Romains, it was time to restore hierarchy, whatever its flaws might be; fascism claimed precisely to want to restore a “true and natural hierarchy of values.”

Another flaw of modern society was the lack of what Jules Romains had called “collective euphoria”: modern man is miserable; the worker regards the factory as a prison; the bureaucrat sees his office as a besieged fortress. The social structure, according to Romains, was threatened by the myth of class struggle, but fascism was also trying to resolve this problem. “It is seeking to build a modern society in which everyone is in the right place and declares themselves happy to be part of it. France is not obliged to abandon democracy,” Romains concluded, “but it should embrace the bold and wise ideas it can find in fascism and Bolshevism.

When, thanks to a synthesis whose foundations are provided by the current regime, we show the world that a democracy can be built on a hierarchical system, governed by laws other than those of money, and that it is possible to return to collective euphoria without sacrificing human freedoms, we will once again become what we have been so many times in the past: the guide for other nations and the founders of the new order.”

The predominantly moralistic origin of this attitude toward fascism is confirmed by two facts. On the one hand, by the decline that this type of intellectual sympathy for fascism experienced in the second half of the 1930s, as—in the face of the war in Ethiopia, the intervention in Spain, the rapprochement with Germany, and the introduction of racial policy— the Mussolini regime revealed a face that was increasingly different and morally (as well as politically) less and less in line with the image that a certain number of intellectuals had come to form of it in previous years.

On the other hand, many of these intellectuals—who nonetheless viewed the Italian experience with interest and sympathy—did not particularly identify Mussolini with fascism. By this—let us be clear—we certainly do not mean to suggest that intellectuals did not also contribute to Mussolini’s “success,” nor that there were no admirers or glorifiers of his among them. In fact, quite a few of them, too, succumbed to the charm of his personality and extolled him, hoping for “a Mussolini” for their own countries as well.

The belief that Mussolini had “conceived and accomplished miracles” and that his very presence exuded an aura of strength that explained the regime’s effectiveness was certainly not a conviction held

by Sacha Guitry alone.

Other intellectuals expressed themselves in more or less the same terms during this period.

On the whole, however, at the intellectual level—and especially among the leading and most genuine intellectuals—interest in and sympathy for fascism, compared to what was happening at lower levels, remained largely a form of appreciation for certain “morally conscious” and “courageously innovative” aspects of fascism’s work; aspects that were certainly linked to the Duce’s personality as well, but without this generally implying either unconditional admiration for Mussolini (certain “shadows” and contradictory elements of his personality did not escape the notice of some of these intellectuals) or a reduction of the fascist phenomenon to his person, as if everything happening in Italy stemmed from his “genius” and were the work of his will.

If one carefully examines everything that was written abroad during the years under consideration here, it must be noted that—with the exception of a few specific borderline cases—this reduction was not made by the intellectuals who took an interest in Fascism or sympathized with it, but rather at the journalistic level and especially by the “opinion” press (we use this term in its broadest sense, encompassing both some of the more “authoritative” and “serious” periodicals and popular newspapers) and above all by the Anglo-Saxon press, which not only indulged itself to the fullest in this particular genre of journalism (somewhat political but especially scandal-mongering, sensationalist, and crassly commercial—that is, aimed at exploiting a surefire money-maker, since it appealed to just about every mood of the readers), particularly suited to those countries where Italians were still regarded as a backward people and therefore incapable of achieving anything new or positive except through the “carrot-and-stick” approach of an exceptional figure who was, for better or worse, typically “Italian.”

Instances of the glorification and mythologization of Mussolini—especially by the conservative press, which was most prone to sensationalism—had already occurred in the first half of the 1920s.

A typical example in this regard is an article by G. Ward Price Dellane from 1923 in the *Daily Mail*, which reads:

He is an Elizabethan. Taking into account the changes in circumstances, he is to modern Italy what Raleigh and Drake were to England in the time of Queen Elizabeth. He embodies the new spirit that has taken hold of his nation, and there is much spiritual similarity between Italy at the beginning of the 20th century and England at the beginning of the century: the same intense national pride, the same boundless optimism, the same sense of destiny at stake, the same quick and sensitive temperament, the same tendency toward intrepidity, the same generous ardor of a nation conscious of its youth and its strength.

I am convinced of one thing: Mussolini is not the kind of man one can dismiss by calling him, from the comfort of an armchair in Downing Street, “a papier-mâché Napoleon.” He is a major force in today’s Europe and, as such, deserves to be taken seriously—not merely met with a polite little smile.

As the British caricatures of the Napoleonic era attest, it is easy to ridicule the mannerisms of a great man. But no one could have accomplished what Mussolini has already done without being great—at least in certain respects, great in terms of willpower, courage, and the ideal he ascribes to a noble cause.

Until the late 1920s, however—especially in Europe—this type of journalistic coverage had been relatively rare and generally confined to the conservative or more or less openly pro-fascist press. The rest of the press had maintained—generally speaking—a much more cautious stance and, on the whole, one that was more critical than favorable toward Mussolini. Nor, at both the journalistic level and in terms of mainstream public opinion, had the lively controversies and the efforts by Italian anti-fascists to demystify and denounce fascism and certain pro-Mussolini attitudes creeping into the European press been without effect.

The situation in America, and especially in the United States, had already been quite different during these years. Unlike in Europe—where the presence of strong left-wing parties and a large number of recent Italian emigrants (both political and economic), who had experienced firsthand the tragedy of fascism's rise to power, and where a more ideological conception of democracy and a different type of mass culture constituted an obstacle to the flourishing of openly pro-fascist and/pro-Mussolini attitudes, in the United States (and, albeit to a lesser extent, in Latin American countries) fascism—and Mussolini in particular—benefited from the very beginning from a more favorable attitude on the part of both the general public—including the media as well as informed circles—and the press, which, moreover, faced less resistance and criticism than on this side of the Atlantic and was able to benefit from the growing support of a large portion of Italian emigrants and Italian-Americans, for whom fascism represented a sort of psychological "revenge" and a means of self-affirmation in relation to the society in which they lived and within which they occupied one of the lowest rungs.

As Diggins rightly wrote:

Whatever Mussolini's reputation may be today, it is certain that from the March on Rome to the start of the Ethiopian War, he was a highly regarded figure. Americans, in particular, saw in him certain enduring qualities that made him a "great man" not only of his time but of all time. Many of the images used to describe him in the press were those of a man of heroic character, and the qualities portrayed by these images were specific to and characteristic of the American value system.

Although typically American, these images deserve to be remembered. Some of them—if not all—were, in fact, taken up to some extent in Europe during the first half of the 1930s and contributed significantly to Mussolini's "success." According to Diggins, there were essentially six such images: that of the redeemer (from this perspective, some compared the "March on Rome" to the Gospel episode of Christ driving the merchants from the temple); that of the quintessential self-made man; that

of the realistic and pragmatic politician; that of the athlete, vibrant and agile both physically and in political action, that of the man who was both virile and intellectual, and that of the great enthusiast.

Six images that, in different ways, all contributed to creating that of the modern hero who finally brought into politics those “virtues” in which the average American believed most and upon which he based his own aspirations for success and his social behavior. A modern hero who certainly was not without negative and grotesque aspects (which, not coincidentally, cartoonists gleefully exploited), yet these did not detract from his popularity among the average American—both because they were attributed more to his Italian identity and to the challenge of governing a people like the Italians (it was no coincidence that Mussolini was often compared to Caesar, Napoleon, Cromwell, and… T. Roosevelt —though many, when speaking of him, also recalled the Italian “condottieri” of the Renaissance), and because this meant that certain statements and outbursts of his, which should have aroused alarm and concern, were not taken seriously and were considered purely for “internal use,” and, finally, because all of this was redeemed by his “human qualities.”

Diggins saw this clearly when he wrote:

In truth, America’s admiration for Mussolini was also marked by “a hateful connection” between his remarkable achievements and his repugnant methods.

Watching the Duce struggle to achieve what they considered just ends by unjust means, Americans could take pride in their country’s supposed moral superiority, where such methods were not employed.

Americans understood that Mussolini was not a man of impeccable morality, but they were not so naive as to fail to realize that in Italy, even more so than in America, “immorality can lead to greatness.”

“An Italian proverb,” Emerson wrote, “says that ‘to succeed, one must not be too good.’”

It should also be emphasized that Mussolini’s image in America was not as sinister as the anti-fascists later tried to make it appear by equating him with Hitler.

It is true that Mussolini was often portrayed by the popular press as a strong leader endowed with almost superhuman qualities, but this characterization was balanced by the touching portrayal of Mussolini as an “average man,” sensitive to human emotions and capable of sincere affection. All the fuss made about his love for children and animals, his passion for music and sports, his humble origins, and his sympathy for farmers served, intentionally or not, to soften his image as a rough man.

“Rather than a truly cruel despot, Mussolini—as Will Rogers assured Americans—was merely a ‘good guy’; in his boastfulness, he was not much different from an American senator, and he was doing for Italy exactly what Henry Ford was doing for the United States. ‘I think of him as one of the most human beings I have ever seen—and one of the greatest,’ said Irving Cobb, who regarded the Italian

prime minister as a sort of Cincinnatus, a humble warrior who saved his country without allowing himself to be corrupted by power.

Thus, beneath his rough-hewn stubbornness, Americans discovered a human heart: the leader of superlative abilities was also a man of the people. Paradoxical as it may seem, the balance between all these multifaceted images allowed the dictator to pose as a “democratic” hero—what Walter Bagehot called an ordinary man with extraordinary abilities.

Although it remained typical of the United States and those Latin American countries most influenced by the U.S. press and major news agencies, in the first half of the 1930s this image of Mussolini enjoyed some popularity even in Europe, and—even if it remained essentially a minority view—there is no doubt that, at a certain level of mainstream public opinion, it contributed significantly to increasing curiosity and interest in Mussolini the man and to lending substance and “humanity” to the image that, on this side of the ocean (but also in America—on November 5, 1932, the *Pittsburgh Press* wrote, “Mussolini is an ardent advocate of peace, disarmament, and the sanctity of peace treaties… Leader of a reborn state, worthy of succeeding the ancient Roman Empire, Mussolini has completely transformed the Italian character,” and, on March 15, 1934, the far more authoritative *New York Times* would observe with great satisfaction that Mussolini was pulling all the strings of European politics) characterized the “fortune” of the Duce during this period: that of the builder of a new political and social reality, always at the forefront in the search for new solutions designed to advance his country, and that of the defender of peace.

The European popular and “opinion” press of the time speaks volumes in this regard. However, it is not our intention to sift through it to compile an anthology of quotes inspired by these two themes and other minor ones—which, even in Europe, contributed to making Mussolini the most prominent political figure in the pages of the press and to generating the interest around him that formed the basis of his success.

For the purposes of our discussion, rather than a series of quotations of this kind, we believe it is useful to examine how this pro-Mussolini attitude differed across the major countries and to what extent it was, so to speak, spontaneous, and to what extent it can be attributed, to some degree, to a sort of propagandistic skill on the part of the regime.

Regarding the first of the two issues just mentioned, a fairly clear difference can be observed between the British and French press. Setting aside the more or less openly pro-Fascist newspapers—which, incidentally, were growing in number—the French press, on the whole, was less prone to indulging in the glorification of Mussolini than the British press.

Mussolini the man, in general, did not enjoy the same success north of the Alps as he did in England. As for his policies, while there were certainly those who viewed his decisiveness and the way he had “transformed” the Italians with favor and envy, this almost never succeeded in casting a veil of complete oblivion over the anti-democratic nature of the Fascist regime or, until around the summer of 1934, in completely dispelling the old fears regarding the restless neighbor.

This, however, does not mean that after Hitler came to power, many democratic newspapers did not also water down their anti-fascism and sacrifice it almost entirely on the altar of Franco-Italian friendship. Nor does it mean that, in parallel with this, there was not also an increase in sympathy and praise for the Duce.

In fact, if Mussolini's "fortune" in France differed in any significant way from that in other countries, it was precisely in the greater weight that political motivations carried over "human" ones—and, among the political motivations, those linked to the evolution of the international situation. Mussolini as a defender of peace was, between 1933 and 1935, the Mussolini who was truly successful in France. The French press's commentary on the Four-Power Pact (the day after its signing, *L'Ere nouvelle* significantly praised Mussolini and, even more significantly, wrote, "Only yesterday did the war end"), on the events in Austria on July 25, 1934, and on the Laval-Mussolini agreements is extremely telling in this regard.

On December 6, 1934, Jules Sauerwein wrote in *Paris-Soir*, in an article clearly intended to prepare the ground for Laval's visit to Rome, using terms that well reflect the general attitude of the French press at the time toward fascism and Mussolini—and especially regarding the need for an anti-German agreement between the two countries:

The understanding between the two states and the agreement between the two peoples are so logical and natural that this policy, once begun, will certainly continue… For twelve years, Mussolini, young and with an almost revolutionary audacity, has worked to breathe new life into this Italy—so ancient in its history, yet so capable of political rebirth. The Duce, guided by experience and trials, no longer intends to direct this passion for new creations either within or beyond the country's borders. And he wants his country to become, following the example of its leader, steadfast and composed. Following the same evolution by which Bolshevism became conservative, Italy is today irresistibly led to become, alongside us, one of the pillars of stability and a precious guarantee of European peace. Placed by fate halfway between decrepit parliamentary systems and unbridled dictatorships, Mussolini, with his will, his experience, and his clear Roman mind, is par excellence the statesman with whom, according to Mr. Pierre Laval's apt phrase, we must "share European responsibilities on a daily basis."

In the British press, however, the relationship between the image of the defender of peace and that of the builder is reversed—as is the case, for that matter, in nearly all European countries that are, on the one hand, more conservative and, on the other, less directly exposed to the German threat. The following two examples may give an idea of the British press's attitude.

Marking the tenth anniversary of the "March on Rome," on October 28, 1932, the *Daily Mail* wrote:

His immense faith in himself and in his mission made everything possible for him. The secret of his success lies in the fact that he inspired such faith in the Italians. Ignorant and sectarian people speak of Italy as a country subject to tyranny that they would be happy to overthrow. If this were true, Mussolini's ten triumphant years in power would be an even greater marvel. But can anyone in their right mind believe that sheer coercion could have led the Italian people from anarchic disorder to the highest degree of scientific national order ever conceivable—that a state navigating so impressively and steadily through the current industrial storm, and constantly adding new triumphs in the air, at sea, and in every field where human endeavor is exercised, is perpetually and helplessly struggling against tyranny and oppression?

And according to the *Morning Post* of November 29, 1932:

In the last week of October 1922, the figure of a man was projected into the Italian sky; a man who, in the presence of the nations—surrounded at times by malice, at times by envy—has since emerged and now towers over the European horizon… But a decade later, the Duce of Italy rules his country more firmly than ever, and regards his detractors with the same indifference that the gigantic statue of Hindenburg shows toward the nails that Berlin patriots hammered into it during the World War.

How should an Englishman view Mussolini and his fascism? The best way to form a judgment is to reflect on the results, and then, certainly, one must say that the end justifies the means. Ten years ago, Italy threatened to erupt like one of its volcanoes; today it is a united and powerful kingdom.

The blacksmith's son has tempered and shaped the warring factions, forging a sincere and united people. While some good may have been suppressed, great evils have been prevented. Dictatorship is better than disintegration, and through his strict rule, Mussolini has distributed wealth more equitably, disciplined and organized industry into guilds, revitalized agriculture, and reconciled the Italian State with the Vatican. Whether one approves of him or not, the result is magnificent, and his work rests on foundations that appear durable.

History, recalling the rebirth of Italy that began in October 1922, may inscribe Mussolini's name among those of the noblest Romans who have ever lived.

Nor does the picture change when looking at Switzerland. According to the *Journal de Genève* (January 3, 1932), Mussolini was a "formidable personality" who revealed himself "in his gestures, his gaze, and his words." As for the *Revue de Lausanne* (April 5, 1932), he was "a man on the march":

Before the war, he signed a series of articles under the pseudonym: "The Seeker." This perpetual quest is the true hallmark of Mussolini.

We have selected these quotations with the aim of offering the reader some characteristic examples of the most common stances and the most frequent judgments found in the Western press during the first half of the 1930s and, at the same time, of their, so to speak, average tone. Beginning in the second half of the previous decade, the Duce's press office had started systematically collecting everything written about Mussolini around the world.

Fortunately, this vast body of material has largely survived intact through the vicissitudes (and the resulting dispersion) of the Mussolini archives and constitutes indispensable documentation for assessing Mussolini's "fortuna" across various periods and countries.

Beyond the individual quotations and examples that can be drawn from it, this material amply documents what we have repeatedly asserted in these pages: namely, that Mussolini's "fame" in the West reached its peak in the first half of the 1930s, often taking on explicitly laudatory tones.

Its greatest value, however, in our view, lies elsewhere: in allowing us to grasp the true meaning (and thus the limitations) of "Mussolinism," which characterized much of the Western press during those years.

Although it exhibited different characteristics and nuances from country to country, the attitude of the Western news media during this period can be broadly summarized as following two trends: one aimed at downplaying the anti-democratic and repressive nature of fascism and, instead, emphasizing certain operational, technical, innovative aspects of the regime's policies—considered positive for Italy and, not infrequently, presented in a way that revealed not only interest and approval but also a sort of envy for the ability to effectively govern the country and to direct its moral and material commitment in the direction intended by the fascist government—capabilities that democratic governments lacked; and the tendency to attribute all of this very often to Mussolini's personality—to his ability to implement his policies with the consent and participation of the vast majority of the Italian people, to his dynamism, his realism, and his willingness to challenge what was no longer suited to the times, without, however, being afraid to go against the grain when it came to preserving and revitalizing values and institutions he considered useful for achieving his goals.

Although these two tendencies are often closely conflated, on closer inspection they rarely truly merged.

This observation is, in our view, the key to understanding and properly assessing the true significance of Mussolini's "fortune," as it appears in the press of the time, and, at the same time, the influence it had on public opinion and the reasons for its collapse in the second half of the 1930s.

Given what we have said in the preceding pages, we will not dwell on the general picture: it is evident that to understand and properly assess the significance of Mussolini's "success," one cannot ignore the very particular moment in which it manifested itself—the economic crisis and its moral, cultural, and political repercussions—and, therefore, the hopes and illusions that fascism (or, rather, its positive aspects) might point to a "third way" in both politics and economics; just as one cannot ignore the international context and the fears aroused by the threat to peace and the European balance posed by the rise to power of National Socialism—and, consequently, the hopes and tactical maneuvers toward Italy that these fears encouraged. At the same time—and we have already mentioned this as well—it must always be kept firmly in mind that all these preconditions were almost always presented in the

press in extremely simplified and schematic forms and interpretations, which rendered the discourse on fascism almost always detached from its actual reality, from how fascism actually manifested itself in Italy: on the one hand, in a generic and theoretical manner (the need for authority, dictatorship, etc.), on the one hand, and abstractly moralistic (the need for new values, anti-capitalism, etc.), and on yet another hand, allusive (both when the emphasis was placed on the typically Italian character of fascism —almost as if to suggest that among more "evolved" peoples it would not have required certain forms —and when reference was made to what was being accomplished in Italy to indirectly highlight what was viewed negatively in the reality of their own countries).

In light of what we have said on this subject, it seems to us that only two specific comments need to be made. The first concerns the Italian reality. Reading the Western press of those years today—and in particular what it wrote about Italy—one must never forget that this was, in fact, the period that could most suggest to foreign observers a less pessimistic and, in some respects, even optimistic view of the fascist regime: apart from events both large and small (but no less shocking for that, especially for people who generally held Italians in very low regard), such as the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes, the urban and archaeological "renewal" of Rome, Balbo's transatlantic flights, the Rex's record, and the firsts and victories in aviation competitions—which greatly impressed foreigners and contributed decisively to reinforcing the idea of the regime's effectiveness and its ability to achieve major technical and social progress; aside from the influence of these events, which are in themselves significant for understanding that perspective, one must not underestimate the impact of a whole series of other events:

1) After the Matteotti murder, there had been no further instances of extreme violence that had elicited a reaction abroad even remotely similar to that caused by the killing of the reformist leader: this had fostered the widespread belief that the Matteotti murder had been merely an isolated incident and that, in any case, the regime had by then become more liberal and humane;

2) Compared to other Western countries, the Fascist regime gave the impression of handling the "Great Crisis" well;

3) While anti-fascists had for years spoken of the regime's imminent collapse, it not only appeared solid but also enjoyed broad popular support;

4) the corporatist system was still in the phase of its cultural and institutional-organizational development: at a stage, therefore, in which its flaws and inefficiencies had yet to emerge except to a minimal extent, while the fervor of the discussions surrounding it, the regime's propaganda campaign, and the suggestion of certain apparent affinities with other efforts being made around the world to tackle the crisis and reform capitalism could lead one to believe in it.

Closely linked to this first observation—concerning the Italian reality and how it might appear, and very often did appear, to foreign observers—is the second, which we might define as relating to the opportunities these observers had to form their own, more precise, and less superficial understanding of the Italian reality and the Fascist regime.

In our view, the issue must be considered on two levels: that of those who followed Italian events from abroad and that of the far fewer individuals who had, to some extent, direct knowledge of Italy. The judgment of the former depended largely not only on the general atmosphere of the moment but also on that of the latter and on the news disseminated—directly and indirectly—by the regime through its various channels of information and propaganda.

In both cases, therefore, it was significantly influenced by the image that Fascism managed to project of itself.

Indeed, there is no doubt that in most cases, even the picture of Italian reality and the judgment passed on it by correspondents and special envoys in Italy were largely influenced by the regime or, at the very least, were heavily shaped by the official atmosphere of Italian life.

As for the correspondents, one must take into account the conditions under which they had to operate. Aside from the controls (which, in reality, were not very strict during this period) to which they were subjected, aside from certain direct and indirect forms of petty corruption or favoritism directed toward them, and aside from a certain degree of self-censorship that many practiced to maintain their good relations with the Fascist authorities or to avoid creating difficulties for their embassies, in most cases, foreign correspondents in Italy drew their information and formed their opinions primarily from the Italian press, from Stefani press releases, and from news distributed by the press offices of the regime's various agencies; they rarely had contact with sources other than the more or less official ones in the capital or a few other major cities; extremely rarely with figures outside the regime and, in any case, never with members of anti-fascist groups operating politically underground. Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that their assessments of Italy were almost always superficial and formulaic, lacking in personal insight (to the point that the editorials and commentaries written back home by their colleagues were sometimes more critical than their own dispatches), and that the news they transmitted concerned essentially the official life of the regime (and especially foreign policy) and very little the actual condition of the country.

Above all, many of them ended up being unwittingly influenced by the order, industriousness, and consensus that the regime's official atmosphere exuded, and thus lost much of their critical faculties.

The situation was even worse for special correspondents. Coming to Italy for short periods—often just a few days—their ability to understand and assess the reality of Italy was in fact even more limited, since the stronger the influence of their first impressions, the greater the impact of the courtesies extended to them, and the less critically they could evaluate the statements and predictions about the future developments of Fascism made by the regime figures with whom they came into contact. Not to mention the profound influence that, as we shall see, an audience with Mussolini almost always exerted on them.

Nor, finally, should one assume that what we have said applies only to the world of the press. In general, in fact, a very similar argument must also be made for other observers—often culturally and socially more qualified and worldly-wise, and not infrequently anything but well-disposed toward fascism.

Unless they had long-standing familiarity with Italian reality, even for them a brief stay was not only insufficient to give them an idea of what the fascist regime actually was, but often left them with impressions not very different from those a special correspondent might have.

A typical example is the reaction that, in the late 1920s, a brief stay on behalf of the League of Nations' cultural organization—which included an audience with Mussolini—elicited from Julien Luchaire (a quintessential French intellectual who, moreover, had lived in Italy for a long time before and during the war):

Many things struck me as jarring in Italy. But there, as everywhere else I encountered it, I appreciated the will for change; this was a time for the world not merely to be, but to become. I was working toward a revolution that was, in more ways than one, the opposite of fascism; but the desire to create a new order—whatever form it might take—was common ground on which we could find common ground, at least temporarily…

Mussolini, who was originally neither a military man nor a financier but ultimately a sort of intellectual—a manipulator of ideas as much as of men—did not underestimate the kind of proposal I presented to him. That day, in a few minutes of conversation, everything was settled; I obtained all the promises I wanted, including that of a cash contribution; and I had to appreciate the advantages of absolute power; fifteen days later, all the promises had been fulfilled.

Given this situation—which clearly explains the prevailing attitude of the Western press toward fascism in the first half of the 1930s—if anything in this attitude truly holds significance, it is not so much the fact that—as has been said—this press gave little prominence to the anti-democratic and repressive nature of fascism and spoke favorably of its technical, innovative, and effective aspects of the regime, but rather the observation that, despite this, this same press ultimately never allowed itself to be seduced by the idea that the positive aspects of fascism could lead one to deny any importance to the negative ones; that is to say, in other words, to regard fascism as something worth imitating in its entirety and that could, therefore, be imported into their own countries.

And this explains, in our view, two things: the ease with which this attitude changed as soon as the anti-democratic and oppressive nature of fascism came to the fore once again and, moreover, took on a dimension that was not merely national but international; and why one cannot really speak of a true "success" of fascism in the West during the first half of the 1930s, whereas it is indisputable that one can speak of Mussolini's success and, ultimately, it can even be said that if, at that time (since, in fact, for the subsequent period the argument must be reversed), fascism enjoyed a certain degree of sympathy in the West and aroused considerable interest (outside of certain intellectual circles and groups that were already fascist or on the path to becoming so), this was primarily a reflection of the prestige, the sympathy, and the "success" of its Duce.

In the preceding pages, we have already discussed the various images that characterized Mussolini's "fortune" on both sides of the Atlantic. It would be absurd to deny that these images had no basis—that is, that they did not stem from certain specific types of "culture" and sensibilities of the time, or that they had no connection to Mussolini's politics or, at the very least, to the interpretation most commonly attributed to it.

However, explaining Mussolini's "fortune" solely in this light would be utterly insufficient. Doing so, in fact, would mean missing the opportunity not only to grasp a whole series of its components but—more importantly—to understand why it took on such vast proportions and collapsed so rapidly.

In our view, a comprehensive explanation must begin with a question at the level of average public opinion: Who created Mussolini's "success"? Who sparked interest and curiosity in him as a person? Who turned him into a figure of global prestige?

As usual, there is no single answer. Mussolini's "success" in the Western world certainly had many contributing factors. Contributing to this in varying degrees were Fascist propaganda abroad; the presence in various countries of large Italian communities, which—especially in some cases—served as a sort of sounding board; the polemics of anti-Fascist exiles; the attacks by the left-wing and anti-Fascist press in general; and the growing attention that the international press paid to Italian foreign policy in the late 1920s.

Nor can we underestimate other factors—some seemingly secondary or already beginning to have an impact during the period under consideration, even though they would prove more significant in the years to come. Consider, on the one hand, the indirect effect of propagandists such as Pirandello, Balbo, or Carnera and, on the other hand, the influence—both positive and negative—of the emergence of the first fascist parties in Europe and the Americas, which, though small, were vocal and thus drew the attention of the press and public opinion not only to themselves but also to their ideal and political model.

All these "fathers," individually and collectively, did not, however, have the same significance as the news and opinion press, with its myriad articles, reports, interviews, and cartoons—not immediately political but, on closer inspection, colorful, more or less sensationalist, and more or less centered on the "human type," the "new man," or in any case the "different" one.

In terms of mass public opinion, it was precisely this press that truly created Mussolini's "fame," spreading his name, image, political and personal affairs, and ideas on the most diverse issues far and wide, and turning him into a public figure even more so—and even before—than a politician. And very often not so much for political purposes as, above all, for commercial reasons, because he constituted a subject—a commodity—that, given his particular characteristics, was a surefire success and—in years when the serious daily press was in crisis and supplanted by the news press, entirely focused on journalistic "scoops" and the race for sensationalism—offered a constant stream of opportunities to be exploited endlessly and, therefore, the certainty of finding buyers, much like major movie stars or great sports champions, with the advantage over them of constituting a new genre—one particularly appealing because it faced no competition and because it appealed not only to human curiosity but also to readers' political sensibilities, allowing them to make every possible comparison with the other types of politicians to whom they were accustomed.

In this sense, the most typical case—and at the same time the most extreme—was that of the U.S. press. As Diggins wrote:

whether consciously or not, American journalists "created" Mussolini through their control of that hypnotic tool known as advertising, and they "created" him simply because he made headlines.

However, this phenomenon was not limited to the United States; to a lesser extent, it was also common in the press of other countries. Moreover, given the influence of the major American news agencies, the connections between various news networks, and the prestige of certain journalists and special correspondents who devoted themselves most to this genre (often subsequently drawing on their reports and interviews to write books—which frequently aimed to compare and contrast the various dictators of the time and were all highly successful)—and the imitative influence that American journalism exerted on the global press, much of what was published across the ocean reverberated directly and indirectly in Europe as well.

Unless one understands this phenomenon, it is not only impossible to form a realistic picture of the highly distinctive nature of Mussolini's "popularity"—in terms of mass public opinion—during the first half of the 1930s, but one cannot even grasp why it suffered, as has been said and repeated, such a drastic and sudden collapse.

This was, in fact, a consequence of the moral and political reaction sparked abroad by the war in Ethiopia and Mussolini's subsequent policies, and, as such, had an immediately and purely ethical-political motivation; but its significance cannot be properly assessed unless one realizes that—at the level of mass public opinion—it also depended, above all, on the highly distinctive nature that Mussolini's "fortune" had possessed up to that point.

A highly distinctive nature that explains, precisely, why—as soon as the major press reversed its stance—his "fortune" turned into "misfortune" for the majority of its readers. This was well summarized for the U.S. press by Diggins when he wrote:

The fact that the press, after the war in Ethiopia, was able to tear Mussolini's image to shreds indicates that the dictator's prestige was largely a product of the American press.

Still on the subject of the architects of Mussolini's "fortune," we must finally include another, very important figure—one who is sometimes decisive in understanding why the Duce appeared to the major news media as such an interesting figure, and why this same press not only exploited the genre to the fullest but, with rare exceptions, clearly succumbed to the spell of its hero, often to a far greater extent than was necessary to sell its product.

This architect was Mussolini himself, whom Salvemini—not by chance—described as "the genius of propaganda," far superior in this regard to any politician of his time, even Hitler himself, who, while surpassing him in the use and efficiency of mass media for domestic purposes, remained far behind him in terms of the results achieved by his propaganda apparatus abroad.

So much so that one must wonder whether the figure of Mussolini could truly have existed if Mussolini himself had not gone to great lengths to create him, perfect him, and continually fuel his allure—not only through the regime's propaganda apparatus but also personally.

In the next volume, we will examine the image of the Duce that the regime and Mussolini himself

sought to establish in Italy. For now, we will limit ourselves to considering the issue as it pertains to the international sphere and in relation to the period under discussion.

This, however, requires us to make one preliminary observation: there were always—and especially in the 1930s—quite significant nuances between the image intended for domestic consumption and that intended for foreign audiences.

The first was that of a far-sighted man of action who knew what he wanted and achieved it without hesitation or doubt; confident, uncompromising, yet at the same time paternal and attentive to the needs and aspirations of the people.

The second was that of a statesman who was also an intellectual who, in solitude, formulated his policies based on a precise set of values that, at their core, were the same as those of the West; aware of the goals to be achieved, a resolute guardian and champion of Italy's national interests, yet also realistically capable of understanding the difficulties and problems that littered the path—and which he therefore had to take into account both as an Italian and as a Westerner.

Often these nuances were so evident that they made the images themselves appear different from one another. And this explains why a whole series of stances or initiatives adopted for external consumption were kept hidden domestically.

Among the examples that could be cited, typical in this regard are the cases of articles and, even more often, interviews written by Mussolini for the foreign press or given to foreign journalists, which (contrary to what generally happened) were not reported (or, at most, were only briefly mentioned) by the regime's press. Not to mention the most typical example of all: *My Autobiography*, which, though widely circulated around the world, was never published in Italy and could not even circulate in a foreign language.

The methods used to project a certain image of Mussolini abroad were numerous, and we will not dwell on them here. It suffices to recall the dissemination of articles and "press releases" concerning his life, his ideas, and his writings; the direct and indirect dissemination of the biography written by Sarfatti (translated into many languages); and the encouragement and promotion of writings and studies by foreign authors on Mussolini, as well as statements and expressions of esteem and admiration for him made by political and cultural figures from various countries.

Nor can we by any means overlook the massive and highly skillful use made of the cinematic and especially photographic image of the Duce: Mussolini the sportsman, Mussolini and flowers, Mussolini and animals, Mussolini the musician, Mussolini and children, Mussolini among the people, Mussolini threshing bare-chested, Mussolini the aviator, etc.—was disseminated throughout the world in thousands of photographs (very often screened and selected by Mussolini himself) which, reproduced in hundreds of thousands of newspaper copies, contributed significantly to arousing and sustaining interest in the Duce, to popularizing his figure, to providing the image best suited to various countries and circles, in a word, to fostering his "fame."

As active as the regime's propaganda apparatus was, Mussolini's best propagandist was, however, as has been said, Mussolini himself, with his exceptional ability to craft, for the benefit of foreigners, that image of himself which, for several years—whether consciously or not—the major news media eventually adopted and, in essence, reproduced: the image of the new statesman, authoritarian yet democratic, a man of action yet thoughtful, dynamic yet realistic, nationalist yet Western.

An important contribution to this self-representation for foreign audiences was made, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, by *My Autobiography* (written by Arnaldo, revised by his brother, and edited during the English translation by the former U.S. ambassador to Rome, R. W. Child), which first appeared in serial form in the Philadelphia *Saturday Evening Post* in 1928, then in various European newspapers, and finally as a book, achieving considerable sales success (the English paperback edition alone sold 100,000 copies).

A contribution—certainly minor but by no means negligible—was also made by the two historical plays *Caesar* and, above all, *Field of May* (in the French version, *Les cent jours*, performed by Gémier, one of the leading French actors of the time), which, as mentioned, were presented abroad—unlike in Italy, where they appeared under only the name of the former—as works by Forzano and Mussolini, if only because of the controversies and protests they sparked in parts of the press and among audiences.

Nor, furthermore, can the contribution of the articles that Mussolini wrote from time to time for certain foreign newspapers (Le Figaro, the Berliner Boursen Corier, etc.)—and especially for the network headed by Universal Service—be underestimated. At a time when leading politicians very rarely sought to make direct contact with “the man in the street” in other countries, these articles by Mussolini did indeed serve a purpose: they helped spread the idea that the Duce was a different kind of statesman, less bound by the traditional forms of international politics, and, above all, they served to keep the general public’s interest in him alive.

The most effective tool Mussolini used to influence the international press—and, consequently, foreign public opinion (as well as Italian public opinion, since much of what was written about him abroad was later used by the regime’s propaganda at home)—in line with the image he wished to project of himself during these years, however, were the interviews he granted during this period (as, indeed, during the following three years) he granted numerous interviews to the international press, particularly to the American and French media.

It is therefore necessary to dwell on these interviews for a moment, especially since the analysis required for them can largely be extended to the countless individual and group audiences that Mussolini used to grant to individual figures as well as to groups of foreigners—people who were fairly insignificant in terms of their immediate political or cultural standing—audiences whose true significance might otherwise be overlooked, whereas in fact they, too, contributed to building his “fortune.”

Suffice it to consider, on the one hand, the persistence with which many of those visiting Italy at that time sought to obtain an audience with the Duce (“Practically every American who goes to Italy wants an audience,” declared an exasperated State Department official, besieged by the constant requests he received), on the other hand, the fact that many of the most enthusiastic statements about Mussolini came precisely from these individual and group visitors, and, yet again, that the impression Mussolini made on these visitors generally coincided with that made on his interviewers, so it is easy to understand how—as they influenced and reinforced one another—all these impressions contributed to establishing, in the public eye, a certain largely positive image of the Duce, an image, moreover, that—being based primarily on human elements—greatly reduced the weight of the political factors that might have made it less acceptable to so many. Consider, for example, these four statements from four different visitors to Mussolini:

Margaret Beavan, mayor of Liverpool:

I have never felt anything like this in my entire life. I have never seen a man so different from all the others, nor such a magnetic personality. It is all—absolutely everything—so overwhelming that I cannot find the words to describe it. I am moved to the very core by his magnetic, commanding, and immense personality.

Aviator Lady Heath:

Mussolini is more than a man; he is a national monument. Just as Egypt depends on the Nile, England on its dominance of the seas, and Arabia on the desert, so too does Italy depend on Mussolini.

Henry Bordeaux, of the Académie française:

I will not repeat the words of friendship toward France with which the Duce concluded this audience; they are tied to current and future diplomatic discussions.

But they were uttered with that smile that softens the mask he has deliberately assumed. Count Molé said that he had known only two irresistible smiles: that of Napoleon and that of Chateaubriand. I would gladly add that of Mussolini.

And finally, Maurice Grimard, a member of a delegation from the Union des Fraternelles de l'Armée de Campagne, an association of Belgian veterans:

On September 10 at six o'clock—for this is a significant date—we entered this imposing government

palace, where the Duce works calmly for the greatness of his country. We had seen him only in photographs and imagined him—let's be frank, along with many others—as someone who likes to pose as Caesar. But as soon as he entered the hall where he usually receives visitors, our impression changed. As he approached us, he did—it's true—display what is instinctive in him: that characteristic movement of the chin, which is really nothing more than a display of strength. A few minutes, however, were enough for him to take on an air of simplicity and kindness.

John Günther, a journalist who—writing in 1936—tended to appear disillusioned and less captivated by the charm of Mussolini's personality than many of his colleagues, wrote the following about interviews with Mussolini:

Like many people who love to read, he also loves to write and writes remarkably well.

In the dozen pages of his pamphlet on fascism, he has condensed the equivalent of what is expressed in the six hundred pages of *Mein Kampf*. He is by far the best-prepared of all dictators; he is the only modern leader who can truly be called an intellectual, possessing solidity and toughness in a country that often lacks them. Despite all his bluster and bragging, his intelligence is cold, analytical, and deductive. He certainly has a universal sense of politics.

Mussolini knows that interviews are the best form of propaganda; that is why he is so generous with them. Many journalists and even newspaper editors are unable to resist the lure of a meeting with a dictator or a head of state; once received by Mussolini or Hitler, they feel a sense of gratitude that clouds their judgment. It is very difficult for the average journalist to speak ill of the important and very busy man who has granted him an hour of friendly conversation.

Taking up this passage from Günther, Diggins, in turn, recently wrote:

Of all the enticements that Fascist officials were able to offer visiting journalists, the most effective was a personal interview with the prime minister. A former journalist himself, Mussolini knew full well what a powerful weapon flattery could be during an exclusive interview, and he never failed to use it to great effect on his eager interlocutors. Consequently, many writers who had been granted the privilege of a personal interview left puffed up with pride and filled with lasting respect for the dictator… The interview invariably ended up undermining the journalist's objectivity and blunting the polemical edge

of his questions. The result was usually a bland interview that allowed Mussolini to reel off the usual patriotic platitudes and the most cloying clichés. “How can the art of government and journalism work together for the good of humanity and for their own benefit?” asked Edward Price Bell, one of the many journalists charmed by Mussolini’s punctuality and courteous interest. The dictator, being the cynic that he was, must have been both amused and astonished by Bell’s naivety, and so he replied: “Through an aggressive and tireless assertion of moral and intellectual energy. By always telling the truth. By fearing nothing but the betrayal of the truth. Through a constant willingness to sacrifice oneself and one’s followers.”

The sight of the journalist allowing Mussolini to preach about “faithfulness to the truth” while in reality practicing censorship demonstrates just how easy it was to fall victim to the fascist dictator’s “black magic.”

There is certainly a grain of truth in these statements. However, stopping there is insufficient; the issue is, in fact, more complex and nuanced.

When receiving foreign visitors and, above all, granting interviews to the international press, Mussolini was undoubtedly playing a role, aimed at presenting the best possible image of himself to his interlocutors, at capturing their imagination and winning their sympathy, giving them an impression of grandeur and strength, but at the same time of balance and realism, presenting himself as a decisive and self-aware statesman, yet also as a true intellectual who understood the roots of politics, and as a sort of great pater familias who never lost touch with everyday reality and its various aspects.

Contributing to this was also the setting in which these meetings generally took place—the large hall of his study at Palazzo Venezia (which, not coincidentally, is so often mentioned in the articles and statements of his visitors and interviewers)—and the informal, personal tone he almost always brought to these encounters, which offered visitors an image of him that was entirely different from the one they had been able to form and had seen at official public events. An image that, as Salvemini rightly noted, immediately put the interlocutor in a favorable frame of mind, both because it flattered their self-esteem and because it led them to attribute the other behavior—the official and public one—not so much to Mussolini as to the character of the Italians and the need for the Duce to formally conform to it.

Likewise, there is no doubt that, attaching great importance to this type of “public relations,” Mussolini devoted considerable effort to it, even though he officially pretended not to care about what was written about him abroad.

He did this both by seeking to establish as cordial a personal relationship as possible with the press (even going so far as to show understanding for his former colleague) and its most prestigious representatives, and by showing himself to be very accommodating to every request for an interview—even from little-known journalists—and even for collaboration (going as far as the extreme case of the *Colloqui con Ludwig*, an unprecedented coup for its author, but also for Mussolini and his reputation abroad), and by giving—as has been noted—his very best in these encounters, in terms of verve, courtesy, and human warmth, as well as intellectual engagement; always demonstrating a thorough knowledge of his interlocutor and the issues—even highly specific ones—that were closest to his heart

and most interesting to him; not without, when appropriate, a touch of charm aimed at winning him over even further, at persuading him to write on that particular topic, or at having him present, in the best possible light, viewpoints and issues on which they disagreed, and above all at ensuring that he remained favorably disposed toward Mussolini in any case.

A typical example of this ability to present himself in the best light is found in *Fascisme an VII*, the book on Italy written by Maurice Bedel. We have already seen in the relevant section how the author of this reportage concluded his book by reaffirming his faith in freedom and his joy—despite everything—at being French and not an Italian forced to live in Fascist Italy.

Yet in this very same book, when the author speaks of his encounter with Mussolini, the tone is one of substantial sympathy, and nothing suggests that, for Bedel, the real Mussolini was not the one he had met in person:

… I assure you that he is anything but what his portraits show… I have seen him smile… I have heard him laugh; I assure you that when he does, his features relax, his teeth part, and he speaks with the sweetest voice in the world, in a slightly modulated, sung—almost chirping—French. No, this man does not spend his life in a gloomy palace writing lists of outlaws or on the balcony haranguing black berets and tricolor flags with a mouth contorted with populist eloquence.

If all this, as we said, is beyond doubt—that is, if it is certain that with foreign visitors, and especially with those he knew would write about him, Mussolini almost always played a role, skillfully exploiting every opportunity afforded by his exceptional ability to grasp people's psychology, to arouse their interest, and to present himself in the best light— so that he was always the one steering the conversation without making it too obvious, thereby imposing his own personality; yet it seems equally impossible to us to explain, solely through his skill—or his histrionics, if you will— the many successes he achieved in these direct interactions with individuals who were sometimes anything but naive and who often possessed a deep understanding of the politicians of the time and were uniquely capable of comparing them to Mussolini.

To understand these successes, it is not enough to simply list the usual explanations: the inability of others to resist the implicit flattery and gratitude for having been able to meet him, the influence of the setting, the acquisition and diabolical refinement of interview techniques, his theatricality, and so on.

We must take a further step—which, incidentally, does not mean resorting to the explanation—which in reality explains nothing—of Diggins' "black magic"; rather, we must grasp the actual components of this "black magic."

First of all, one must realize that—even setting aside the effort he put into it and his innate histrionics—Mussolini excelled at this type of interaction, since it was extremely well-suited to his psychology and satisfied a whole range of aspects of his personality: it interested him, relaxed him, and amused him, and it flattered his pride.

The effort he put into them was therefore not merely instrumental, but spontaneous and heartfelt. Thus, it was precisely in this kind of interaction that he generally felt most at ease and performed at his best, both intellectually and personally. This was especially true in one-on-one interactions, in which—lacking the audience, the crowd to rouse and carry along, and the sense of self-aggrandizement that contact and conversation with the masses provoked in him, and, at the same time, since he almost never had to worry too much about either the nature of the issues discussed or the future developments of the relationship—his participation in the conversation took on a relaxed tone and proceeded almost always simply and straightforwardly, drawing on all the resources derived from his extensive reading and his exceptional ability to recall an infinite number of details and to immediately grasp and synthesize the other person's point of view.

Nor, finally, should we forget that these were, for Mussolini, his best years—psychologically, culturally, and physically—when his decline had not yet begun and the African successes, which would so greatly influence his personality, were still to come.

These meetings interested him (as did the reports which, as mentioned, he read in great quantity) because they satisfied his keen desire to stay informed about what was happening in other countries, to understand what people abroad thought about the international situation, its causes, and its possible developments, and to learn what opinions existed regarding Italy, on Fascism, and on himself; and, furthermore, because through them he always believed he could assess the reliability of what was reported to him by his representatives and correspondents abroad.

One could almost say that in many cases these meetings reawakened the journalist in him and were conducted as if he were the interviewer—rather than, as was often the case, the other way around. They relaxed him and amused him because they provided welcome breaks from his work routine; they allowed him to discuss topics that, given the isolation in which he lived and his lack of friends, he would otherwise either have been unable to address or would have had to treat professionally, ex cathedra; they brought him into contact with a diverse, interesting, and in its own way colorful humanity, so different from what he was accustomed to seeing and dealing with.

They flattered his pride because they appeared to him (and for the most part actually were) as much evidence of his prestige and importance as they were reaffirmations of the success of his personality.

Much has been written about Mussolini's personality, about the charm—or at least the allure—it exerted, sometimes aptly, more often inappropriately; either exalting it or denying it and reducing it to mere infatuation or the result of histrionics. In reality, the issue is, as usual, far more complex and cannot be resolved in either of these two extreme ways.

It is impossible to deny that Mussolini's personality exerted a particular influence. The evidence to this effect is too abundant and unequivocal, and it comes from the most diverse sources—from friends and adversaries alike, from Italians and foreigners alike, from people who barely knew him and from those who knew him very well.

Nor is it sufficient to explain—and, in effect, to deny—this influence by citing the mass media, propaganda, and the repetitive messaging they employed.

There is no doubt that such suggestion played a role—not only with regard to Italians, who were more

exposed to it, but also with regard to many foreigners, especially where and for as long as it was favored by a certain political and cultural atmosphere and, above all, by a certain attitude of the major press.

This influence is largely responsible for the significant role that Mussolini's personality played in his "success" in the Western world and, consequently, for his influence on many of those who came into contact with him during those years—in the sense of conditioning them and predisposing them to recognize that influence and even to fall victim to it.

All of this, however, is not enough to deny that there was something about Mussolini that truly struck those who came into contact with him; to deny it would, in fact, mean that all those who spoke of him were victims of a phenomenon of collective suggestion or conditioning—and this is undoubtedly an exaggeration. On the other hand, if one tries to pinpoint exactly what those who attempted to define Mussolini's personality were referring to—beyond a generic reference to the "strength of character" or "magnetism" he supposedly exuded—one encounters certain recurring elements that make it hard not to conclude that these were precisely the traits that constituted the very personality they spoke so much about. A confident demeanor, abrupt movements, great vitality, a soft tone of voice, a frank manner, impatient in the face of any opposition, and somewhat assertive yet by no means arrogant—indeed, quite open to verbal sparring.

This is the most common portrait that his foreign visitors have left us—the outward aspects of his personality on which everyone generally focused most frequently, almost always deeply struck by the contrast between this man, as they had known him in private, and the one who appeared at public ceremonies, on the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, when he addressed the crowds. And then there were his eyes—the way they accompanied and emphasized his words, anticipating and commenting on them. Those eyes which, according to H. Massis, "no one who has felt them fixed upon him even once can forget," and which inspired Frank Fox of the *Morning Post* to write these effusive words:

Coming face to face with those eyes was a prospect that was somewhat intimidating… Have you ever watched the sun as it sets over the sea in summer, shrouded in a reddish haze that looks like a turbulent crater with a veiled flame, as if to say: "You can look at me calmly now, but I have fiery rays that can blind you"? That is Mussolini's eye. Muhammad, as far as we can imagine, must have had eyes like that.

Aside, of course, from this kind of dithyrambic nonsense, if one wishes to understand the impression Mussolini made on his foreign as well as Italian visitors—and thus their subsequent insistence on discussing his personality—it is impossible to overlook this element as well. This is especially true when one considers that, during the period we are examining, this element—combined with the others we have also discussed—very often became essential in the direct and indirect comparisons that many of those who came into contact with Mussolini frequently ended up making between the Duce and Hitler.

A comparison that, during these years (and often in subsequent ones as well), worked entirely to the

former's advantage—not only from a political standpoint but also with regard to the humanity and personality of the two dictators.

To complete the picture we have outlined in this chapter, the final aspect we need to examine concerns more specifically the spread of fascism as a genuine political movement—that is, beyond the moods, dissatisfactions, fears, aspirations, and myths that, as we have seen, shaped a new way of viewing Fascist Italy, fascism, and, in particular, Mussolini during this period.

We have already noted that during these years the first genuine British and French fascist movements were established. The phenomenon, however, was far more widespread; it affected, to some extent, virtually all European countries (except, of course, the USSR) and various non-European nations, and reached its peak (at least in terms of the formation of new fascist or para-fascist organizations) in 1933–34.

Suffice it to say that, according to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in October 1933 there were fascist-type movements in twenty-three countries; six months later, there were thirty-nine: in all European countries (with the exception of Yugoslavia), in eight American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Panama, Peru, and the U.S.), in five Asian countries (China, Japan, Iraq, Manchuria, and Syria), in one African country (South Africa), and in Australia.

Some of these movements were in reality virtually nonexistent, while others would prove to be quite short-lived. In various countries, there were multiple organizations that claimed to be fascist (or, more accurately in some cases, National Socialist), and these were not infrequently in competition with one another. They were also often plagued by internal conflicts and personality clashes that discredited them and diminished their effectiveness. Even more often, their reference to fascism was more nominal than substantive, and in reality they were authoritarian or radical right-wing movements, with very strong local traditions and characteristics that were difficult to reconcile with one another.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon—especially when viewed from the outside—could make an impression and, depending on one's perspective, arouse concern or satisfaction.

Typical in this regard is what Q. Mazzolini wrote in the preface to the confidential publication that the Historical-Diplomatic Service (Office I) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dedicated to foreign Fascist movements in April 1934:

That Fascism adapts itself in forms and ways appropriate to the social and political traditions and customs of various countries is understandable; what is essential is to note that, in the face of the old liberal theories, new principles of order are emerging—principles by virtue of which it is possible to govern peoples and, in the difficult circumstances of their lives, to defend themselves against hardships, overcome them, and live.

The antagonisms—almost always due to personal ambitions—between certain movements, which are identical in purpose but differ in their methods, in no way diminish the importance of the intellectual revolution currently underway. The Black Shirts of Italy; the Black Shirts of England and Argentina, the Blue Shirts of Poland and Portugal, the Blue "Skirts" of China and the Silver Shirts of the United

States; the Brown Shirts of Germany and Canada; and the Green Shirts of Syria and Cuba—are clear evidence that the fascist idea has now permeated every continent… Thus, even if the imitations are not always successful, the flexibility of the doctrine marks for all the first chapter of a new history, because we are today faced with a new relationship between civil societies and natural laws, with the emergence in human evolution of a higher synthesis of ideas, and with a relationship between the rights of society and the duties of individuals that is entering the world's consciousness for the first time.

In a Europe that, ten years after the advent of fascism in Italy, had witnessed Hitler's rise to power in Germany and had to acknowledge the presence of openly pro-fascist regimes in Austria and Hungary and authoritarian regimes in Poland, in Yugoslavia, and in various other Eastern European countries, what was most striking was the spread—even in England and France—of fascism and a series of far-right movements, all more or less characterized by anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies, which were barely distinguishable from fascism and which, above all, made it difficult to imagine that, had they come to power, they would not have established a regime similar to the fascist one.

This was all the more true given that it was precisely in these two countries—and especially in France—that these movements seemed to be the strongest and most aggressive, capable of garnering not only widespread support but also a significant number of active militants, ready to take to the streets and follow in the footsteps of the fascists and National Socialists, and this at a time when the labor movement and its parties seemed to be on the defensive and plagued by a serious crisis (with the possibility of outcomes even in a fascist direction), and when, among the traditionally liberal and democratic forces, discouragement or more reactionary tendencies seemed, in turn, to be gaining ground.

The psychological and political echoes and repercussions of this resurgence of fascism and para-fascism were manifold and had an impact at all levels, in various ways. What is most important for us to note, however, for the purposes of our discussion, is that this phenomenon also had a very significant influence on Italian fascism and on Mussolini in particular. In the previous chapters, we focused on the ideological and political motivations that led Mussolini during this period to abandon the conception of fascism as a non-exportable commodity in favor of that of fascism as a universal phenomenon.

In light of what we have said in this chapter, however, it seems difficult not to conclude that this "turn" was also rooted in psychological motivations. In other words, it seems hard to believe that the new "universal" conception of fascism was not also influenced by the notion that—regardless of Mussolini's programs, intentions, ambitions, and practical political needs, whether in domestic or foreign policy—fascism was by then establishing itself in Europe and perhaps throughout the world, that this establishment was close to becoming a reality, and that, therefore, Mussolini's policy needed to prepare in every way to manage this impending establishment, both to reap all possible benefits from it and to prevent it from being managed by others—specifically, by the National Socialists.

It is now evident just how mistaken this idea—this prediction—was and how it was based on fleeting and contingent factors. If we consider the atmosphere of the time, however, it is also possible to understand how such ideas could have gained traction. For all its pragmatism, Fascism was an ideological concept, and as such it was evident that the Fascists were—especially at that very particular moment—inclined to offer an ideological assessment of what was unfolding before their eyes, to accept

at face value what was being said and written abroad about Fascism and Mussolini, to interpret unambiguously what was unsettling so many countries, and to overestimate events that were undoubtedly manifestations of a very deep crisis but were by no means irreversible or uncontrollable.

As for the Duce, his conviction that it was inevitable that democratic regimes would “collapse” one by one because they were unable to cope with the crisis—and that fascism would, in parallel, continue to expand ever further—was, on the one hand, encouraged by this misjudgment; on the other hand, it found ample support in his tendency to conceive of the political and social evolution of Europe and the world in terms that—to use a modern expression—we might define as “epoch-making”; a conception he had already put forward in February 1922, in the article “Which Way Is the World Heading?”, and which, as has been noted, he reiterated several times during precisely these years—and not by chance.

Nor, as far as his misjudgment is concerned, should we overlook the fact that, above all, it was likely facilitated by the fact that while Mussolini lacked any direct experience of the reality of other countries and had to base his judgment on second- and third-hand information, many of his collaborators—even some of the most intelligent ones—made the same mistake, despite having direct knowledge of that reality and thus having been in a position to assess it more realistically.

On the political front, the immediate consequences of the rise of fascist and para-fascist movements during this period—which, within the context of the discussion at hand, were of greatest significance—were essentially two.

The first was to accentuate, at both the party and Foreign Ministry levels, the tendency to establish closer and more systematic relations with these movements, often going so far as to subsidize them more or less systematically, in order to promote their activities and expansion while simultaneously seeking to bind them as closely as possible to Italian fascism and shield them from Hitler’s influence and sway.

The second was to encourage Mussolini and the Fascist movement to attempt to develop a minimal political-ideological platform for “universal Fascism”—one suitable for all forms of Fascism and capable of serving as a foundation for the establishment of a sort of Fascist International. This International would be able to link them together and provide them with a broadly unified vision inspired by the Italian model and, therefore, not at odds with Mussolini’s policies.

In the first area, the greatest efforts were made in France and perhaps even more so in England, targeting Mosley and his movement—that is, in the strongholds of the liberal-democratic system. It is, moreover, beyond doubt that in the first half of the 1930s this type of effort was undertaken or intensified in almost all European countries and even outside Europe; although it must be said that its manifestations generally varied considerably from country to country and especially depending on whether the countries were governed by democratic or authoritarian governments: in the former case, in fact, they were directed primarily at fascist or para-fascist parties; in the latter, however, they were generally directed at those forces most likely to benefit Mussolini’s policies, without paying too much attention to their fascist nature and, in some cases, even preferring traditional authoritarian forces to those that were more strictly fascist (especially if these forces harbored sympathies for National Socialism).

“In the 1920s, Fascist Italy exerted influence over nationalist movements in various directions; the most significant initiatives were undertaken in 1934 and the early months of 1935, culminating on December 16–17, 1934, at the Montreux Congress.

Organized by the CAUR, the Montreux Congress seemed for a moment to give the impression that a Fascist International oriented toward the Mussolini model could be launched. That is, from a perspective that, to quote Ledeen, can be summarized as follows:

First, the attempt to involve foreign movements by guaranteeing their independence and integrity; second, a theory of the corporatist state that provided the only solution to Europe's economic crisis; and third, a universal, Christian, yet tolerant doctrine, ready to resist any claim of racial superiority or regional dominance on the continent.

Significantly, the German National Socialists (nor the British fascists) attended the congress, but—in addition to the PNF—fifteen fascist parties and movements from thirteen European countries were represented, apparently willing to agree to lay the foundations for an organization linking them and open to other movements that wished to join, based on the common acceptance of three principles, which were intended to resolve the inherent contradiction between the aim of harmonizing the national idea—which lay at the root of all fascism—and the aim of creating a "universal fascism": the struggle of Europe's younger generations against Bolshevik materialism, capitalist selfishness, and paganism; adherence to the corporatist ideal; respect for the national characteristics of individual movements and parties and—within the framework of a policy of peace—for their respective national interests.

Beyond appearances, the Montreux Congress and the only two meetings of any significance that followed it (in Paris on January 30 and in Amsterdam on April 1, 1935) actually demonstrated just how unrealistic Italy's hopes were of bringing the fascist movements of other countries around to its own positions.

Aside from the suspicions (which were not unjustified, incidentally) that an Italian hegemonic maneuver lay behind the CAUR initiative, the inter-fascist meetings of '34–'35 in fact highlighted the obstacles and divisions that made an effective agreement among the various fascist movements and parties impossible. First, the absurdity of the Italian demand to exclude the National Socialists from the fascist camp (that is, the only other government that openly proclaimed itself fascist), given that this exclusion could be justified only on the basis of considerations of expediency and national political interest—arguments that only some fascist groups might find compelling—while it was untenable from every other perspective; secondly (though in reality this was less a separate issue than a specific aspect of the previous one), the impossibility of finding a genuine point of agreement on the "racial question" and on the stance to be taken toward the "Jewish question."

For Mussolini, at that time, the Jewish question and, more generally, the issue of race were not only matters he did not feel strongly about, but ones that, politically, he viewed in a manner diametrically opposed to Hitler's; both because he realized the unpopularity and hatred these issues aroused against Germany, and because Nazi racial theories tended, more or less explicitly, to emphasize the superiority of the Germanic race over all other races—including the Italian race—with the moral and political consequences that this entailed.

In various fascist movements (generally in Eastern Europe), however, the anti-Semitic element was very strong, and thus the influence of the National Socialist position was very much alive, even though very often those who agreed with the National Socialists on anti-Semitism disagreed with them on racial matters; they were very protective of their own national integrity and independence and saw themselves as part of a shared Western civilization that had nothing to do with the National Socialist Weltanschauung of Aryan racial supremacy and, instead, had many points in common with the Italian fascist conception, which, moreover, had the flaw—at least for the most consistent adherents—of dividing the fascist front, whereas they wanted it strengthened to the utmost because they realized (and by 1935–36 they would have come to realize all the more clearly) that it was by no means certain that the triumph of fascism would be achieved through a peaceful conversion of the younger generations to its ideals, and that it might instead entail a head-on clash—both domestic and international—with the other contender for the succession to democratic-capitalist society: communism.

Hence the impossibility not only of creating a Fascist International, but also of making "universal Fascism" the ideological-political platform around which the various forms of Fascism would coalesce: having become an "export commodity," Fascism could not escape the "laws of the market," and, among the players in the "market," the Italian one was certainly not, at least potentially, the strongest.

Thus, for Mussolini, the "export" of fascism—while undoubtedly a source of prestige and providing him with some useful cards for his immediate political game—also and above all confronted him with a dramatic prospect for the future: either to become a fascist among fascists, accepting the logic and risks of identifying with the National Socialists (a solution that was pernicious for him on the international stage), or to essentially renounce identifying fascism with one of the great historical alternatives of contemporary civilization (a solution that was equally pernicious for him on the domestic front). In other words, the failure of "universal fascism" foreshadowed what would sooner or later become Mussolini's alternative: a choice between fascism and national interests, between fascism and Western civilization—a choice that, in any case, would have meant in practice the negation of historical Italian fascism, since it would either have led to its absorption into the far broader European fascism, inevitably dominated by National Socialism, or to its reduction from a revolutionary and renewing force of Western civilization to a reformist force within Italian society.

6. The War in Ethiopia.

Raffaele Guariglia wrote in his Memoirs that the war in Ethiopia "constituted not only a magnificent military chapter, but also a political action—bold, yes, but brilliant and successful"—the credit for which "undoubtedly belonged to Mussolini, both from a military and a political standpoint," and that its "results would have been extremely beneficial for our people had subsequent political events not thwarted them, primarily due to the situation that had arisen in Europe as a result of Germany and Russia's actions, and in part due to the fatal miscalculations made by the very man who had opened up a vast and fertile field for Italian labor, capable at the very least of alleviating Italy's demographic crisis."

This assessment is extremely interesting to us, both because in 1935–36 Guariglia coordinated the

activities of the various offices dealing with the Ethiopian question at Palazzo Chigi and, therefore, had direct and in-depth knowledge of the events, and because he expressed far more cautious and critical evaluations regarding other aspects of Mussolini's foreign policy, which, therefore lend particular significance to this assessment, especially the part referring to the political aspect of the Ethiopian affair and the Duce's personal role; and, finally, because there are many reasons to believe that Guariglia's attitude toward the Ethiopian campaign was not very different from that of most of the "career" diplomats.

Guariglia was—as we have seen—and always remained a staunch advocate of the idea that "Italy, by virtue of its geographical position and the quantity and quality of its population, was destined to be an African colonial power and had to do everything in its power to become one and to expand its sphere of influence on that continent as much as possible," and, in particular, of the idea that the natural theater of Italian expansion should be, for a whole series of historical, political, and psychological reasons, Ethiopia.

In the summer of 1932, upon leaving Palazzo Chigi for the embassy in Madrid as a result of the reorganization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs following Grandi's replacement, he had written this "testament" for his successor:

In essence, Eritrea and Somalia—no matter how vast their territory has become and no matter how fully their agricultural and industrial potential may be exploited—can still be considered nothing more than maritime outposts, the forward positions toward the hinterland, which is Abyssinia. We will not have true colonies in East Africa until, from those two colonial facades known as Eritrea and Somalia, we have penetrated—in whatever form—the Abyssinian hinterland…

If we wish to expand our country's colonial reach—or, to put it boldly, to form a true Italian colonial empire—we cannot achieve this in any other way than by pushing toward Ethiopia. The places in the sun—especially under the African sun (which are the ones that interest us most)—are all already taken. As for the Portuguese colonies, we must deal with Portugal, and for now it is impossible to see by what means or under what pretext we could begin to acquire them, even setting aside the claims of the Union of South Africa and even our existing commitments to it. As for the former German colonies, we will have to deal with Germany. But none of these territories would align so naturally with our pre-existing interests, with the sacrifices we have already made, or with the thread of colonial activity that has already begun.

And fifteen years later, in his *Memoirs*, despite everything that had happened in the meantime, he reaffirmed this conviction:

As for the small part that concerns me personally, I explicitly state that I have always considered the

acquisition of Abyssinia (a practical and substantial acquisition, of course, and in any useful form—that is, collaboration, control, mandate, or protectorate—with little or no regard for the title or imperial organization) to be highly advantageous economically for our “great proletarian” homeland, and such as to give our colonies economic—and not merely political—value.

If one were to stop at this type of statement or others—such as the one (found in a letter to Grandi dated February 19, 1932[3]) that “if it is true that nothing great is accomplished in the world without staining one’s hands with blood, this is indisputably true in the history of colonization” —one would have to conclude that Guariglia’s judgment, from which we began, is entirely obvious, self-evident, and not at all interesting: nothing more and nothing less than the reaffirmation of a deep-rooted colonialist vocation, so vivid as to render Guariglia incapable of offering a historical assessment of the significance of the conquest of Ethiopia even after the end of the Fascist era and World War II.

In reality, Guariglia’s discourse on Ethiopia—both in the 1930s and in his *Ricordi*—is far more complex and interesting and must be kept firmly in mind if one wishes to understand how Mussolini and the most responsible segment of Italian diplomacy conceived of the Ethiopian campaign and how they sought to integrate it into the broader context of Italian foreign policy.

From 1931–32 onward, Guariglia’s position (and that of a large part of the “career” diplomats along with him) regarding Ethiopia was, in its own way, consistent. Italy had to expand into Ethiopia (the form this would take was secondary; it would be determined in practice at the appropriate time).

This could and should take place only in agreement with France and England and with due regard for the interests that these two powers had in that country. On this point—the true cornerstone of the entire operation—Guariglia had been extremely explicit since 1932.

In his “testament” to his successor at Palazzo Chigi, he wrote:

Italy cannot tackle the Ethiopian question on its own, both because of the general European situation and the dangers arising from it, and because of the treacherous local political and military situation. It is impossible to do so in opposition to France and England; it is essential to do so in agreement with them.

If this agreement and this respect were to be the cornerstone of the entire operation, its “political” rationale had to lie in Rome’s friendship and alliance with Paris and London against Berlin, while its “legal” premise had to lie in the Tripartite Agreement of 1906, by which England, Italy, and France had defined and committed to respecting their respective spheres of interest in Ethiopia. For Guariglia, the Tripartite Agreement of 1906 was “the Magna Carta of our rights and aspirations.”

As far as England was concerned, its significance had been confirmed and reaffirmed in December 1925 through the exchange of notes between Graham and Mussolini: In these notes, the two governments had in fact committed to assisting one another in securing from the government in Addis Ababa the concession to build a dam on Lake Tana, a highway from the Sudanese border to the dam (for England), and a railway linking Eritrea and Somalia through western Ethiopia (for Italy) and England had committed, once it had obtained what was important to it, to recognize Italy's right to "exclusive economic influence in western Abyssinia and throughout the territory traversed by the railroad."

As for France, the significance of the tripartite agreement had been confirmed and reaffirmed far more explicitly by the Laval-Mussolini agreements of January 1935. From this perspective, for Guariglia, the Ethiopian campaign was not only intended to provide Italy with a means of expanding in Africa, but was also necessary to achieve two other objectives—purely political and no less important:

1) to create a stronger basis for solidarity with England and France through a political course aimed at avoiding future European conflicts, or, if these proved inevitable, through our participation in the struggles intended to resolve them in accordance with European interests and, in particular, our own interests;

2) to strengthen, rather than weaken, Italy's military effectiveness in Africa—a theater of war that, in the event of a conflagration, would inevitably open up alongside the European theater.

Guariglia remained deeply convinced of this, to the point that in his Memoirs he wrote:

If these objectives were not achieved, it was not because Italy went to war against Abyssinia or because Italy wanted to "build an empire," as British Minister Bevin put it, "at a cost it could not bear" (since the cost would have been quite sustainable had Italy sought political credit from England and had England been convinced of the value of granting it), but because Germany succeeded in convincing Mussolini of its overwhelming power and because Mussolini, under the sway of that conviction, gave free rein to his own resentments and political theories to the point of burning his bridges behind him.

The conquest of Abyssinia had only two harmful aspects in terms of Italian political conduct, namely: 1) that it was carried out in ways and by methods that irritated world public opinion, although it must be acknowledged that this irritation was foolishly fomented—rather than calmed—by the government in London and the anti-fascists in Paris due to a misguided political calculation;

2) that it instilled in Mussolini the personal conviction that he was not only a great political leader but also a great military leader.

Undeniably, the military conduct of the war in Ethiopia was carried out with a breadth of vision and resources for which credit must be given to Mussolini himself, so much so that American military

experts did not hesitate to describe it as the most brilliant colonial operation undertaken up to that point, while the judgments and pessimistic predictions formulated by German military authorities—first and foremost General Blomberg—proved to be fundamentally wrong. But the justified sense of satisfaction Mussolini felt over the rapid success of the Ethiopian campaign led him to tackle European conflicts with an exaggerated confidence in his own military and political abilities, even as they took on proportions far exceeding his capabilities in foreign policy—and not just his alone.

We have taken the time to illustrate Guariglia's point of view because it highlights two things that must be kept firmly in mind if one wishes to understand the Ethiopian affair—both in its origins, its unfolding, and the significance it held and subsequently assumed after its conclusion for those responsible for Italian foreign policy and, essentially, for Mussolini himself.

First: that at Palazzo Chigi (where the Ethiopian affair originated and was politically managed), all those who played an active role in it—Mussolini foremost among them—embarked on it not only confident that the governments in Paris and London were too interested in Italian friendship and solidarity on the European continent to oppose a resolution of the Ethiopian question in line with Rome's wishes (especially since these same governments had for years more or less explicitly recognized Italy's prevailing interests in Ethiopia, and their representatives and emissaries had hinted that they considered it inevitable that Italy would sooner or later effectively realize this claim), but also convinced of the need to act in concert with them. The gradual, marked deviation of the Ethiopian affair from the framework within which it had been conceived, and the intensity of the public controversies that ultimately pitted Italy against France and, above all, against England, should not be misleading.

As we shall see later, even when this framework completely collapsed, both of the aforementioned convictions remained at the core of Italian strategy: for while the first served as the basis for the "calculated risk" on which Mussolini grounded his decision to "press ahead"—that is, to proceed by force despite the opposition of the League of Nations, namely London and (with far less resolve and conviction) Paris— this should not, however, lead one to believe that this entailed the abandonment of the second; on the contrary, at least in terms of general tendency, this remained alive at Palazzo Chigi and, on closer inspection, operative—at least in the sense of avoiding concrete political initiatives (such as withdrawal from the League of Nations) that might have exacerbated tensions with London.

Second: that even after the "conquest of the Empire"—and despite the fact that this had been achieved in a manner (and to an extent) quite different from what was initially anticipated, and above all with extremely serious damage to Italian-French-British relations—the most responsible segment of Italian diplomacy (drawn especially from the "career" diplomats, but in some cases also from the fascist camp) and, ultimately, Mussolini himself (albeit amid uncertainties, Machiavellian maneuvers, contradictions, and personalistic outbursts) continued to believe for quite some time that the crisis in relations with London—since a return to the friendship of 1935 with Paris was hindered, at least for the moment, by the presence of the "Popular Front" in the government and, in any case, it was clear that, when push came to shove, France would end up following England) could be mended and that Italy could return—depending on one's perspective—either to a policy of cooperation with England in an anti-German capacity or (and this was the intention, among others, of the Duce) to a policy of oscillation or decisive influence; that is, they continued to believe that, despite everything, the

Ethiopian affair had not forced Italy to make a definitive choice of sides and had not precluded the possibility of resuming talks with London and, sooner or later, with Paris at the point where they had stood at the beginning of 1935; and, moreover, from a position of greater strength, because Italy had conquered its empire and declared itself satisfied, while Germany was now explicitly on the path to rearmament.

Having clarified—albeit only preliminarily—this fundamental point, the first question that arises for anyone studying the Ethiopian campaign is that of the moment when Mussolini decided to actually launch it, precipitating an international situation that seemed to be evolving in the direction he desired, to the point that some have considered it not unreasonable to think that a more prudent and gradual diplomatic preparation could have made the resolution of the Ethiopian problem far less dramatic.

That Mussolini had long believed that Fascist Italy, for a whole range of reasons—including prestige, power, economic factors, and demographics—should expand into Africa is beyond dispute, as we have already noted. Equally beyond dispute is that he focused this expansion primarily on Ethiopia. Nor can this preference come as any surprise. Ethiopia was, in fact, the only African country that was practically available—that is, not subject in any way to other colonial powers; moreover, as we have seen, Italy claimed certain long-standing rights over it that, at least formally, both England and France recognized; geographically, moreover, Ethiopia was certainly the most suitable country for Italian expansion, both in the short and long term: in the short term, due to the presence to its north and south of the old colonies of Eritrea and Somalia, which could serve as bases for political, economic, and military penetration; in the long term, for a potential link with Libya via Sudan.

And finally, there was—as we have already mentioned—a whole series of historical and psychological reasons to which, on the one hand, Mussolini and fascism were particularly sensitive and which, on the other hand, they could exploit to emotionally mobilize Italians and instill in them a “colonial consciousness” far more easily than for any other African territory.

That said, it must also be noted that for a decade Mussolini did nothing to put his expansionist plans into action, neither politically nor economically. The agreement with England in December 1925 was driven more by London—as part of its own complex web of interests—than by Mussolini. During this period, Palazzo Chigi essentially pursued a policy of friendship toward Ethiopia, and if at times the Italian stance showed some wavering, this was primarily due to a certain divergence of views between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Colonies.

Nor can this overall assessment be called into question on the basis of the instructions Mussolini gave to the Minister of the Colonies, Lanza di Scalea, on July 10, 1925:

Prepare ourselves militarily and diplomatically to take advantage of a possible collapse of the Ethiopian Empire… In the meantime, work quietly—where possible in collaboration with the British—and lull the official world into complacency.

These instructions, in fact, were not only entirely in line with the colonial policy of the time but must

be judged on the basis of the preparations made to take advantage of the eventuality to which they referred.

And these preparations were practically nonexistent. Suffice it to say that until 1931, Italian forces in Eritrea and Somalia were extremely scarce (at the end of 1931, the total number of colonial and indigenous troops did not reach 8,000), communication routes were entirely rudimentary, and around 1932, military appropriations for Eritrea were actually reduced.

Until 1932, it is impossible to find tangible evidence of Mussolini's genuine interest in Ethiopia. Even in the realm of political and journalistic debate and domestic propaganda, nothing up to that time suggests a deliberate effort to prepare public opinion, to "create a colonial consciousness and will," or to place the issue of expansion into Ethiopia on the agenda. Statements on these issues remained vague and did not go beyond the traditional assertion of Italy's "right" to have the commitments made by its allies in 1915 regarding colonial matters honored, and the equally traditional insistence on the need for Italy's abundant labor force to find outlets beyond the kingdom's borders.

And here, too, the connotations were telling, given that while, in general, the discourse focused on the need to secure for Italy colonies for settlement, there were nonetheless those who still framed the colonial discourse in the terms it had taken between the late19th and early 20th centuries—between Adwa and the resurgence of colonialism that had led to the conquest of Libya—namely, as a systematic colonization of certain areas of Latin America or, more rarely, Africa. This, of course, did not entail actual possession of the areas in question but was intended to serve not only as an outlet for Italian labor but also to develop foreign trade with them.

The first signs of Mussolini's genuine interest in Ethiopia in 1932 are clearly linked to Laval's initial overtures and to the maturing in Mussolini of the idea for that new policy that would lead him to become the promoter of the Four-Power Pact. The first of these signs was the fact-finding mission to Eritrea entrusted to De Bono and the plan for a possible operation in Ethiopia that De Bono prepared at Mussolini's behest.

As already mentioned, De Bono's diary also reveals that the Duce, upon receiving the plan (which was based on the assumption of an operation conducted with French and British consent), referred to 1935 as the year of its possible implementation. This reference, combined with the fact that, for the time being, no action was taken beyond the study of operational plans and nothing was done in terms of the concrete preparation of the forces and logistical structures indispensable for military action, suggests that, for Mussolini, while the Ethiopian issue was on the agenda, it had not yet reached the mature stage of practical resolution. And, in fact, until 1934, nothing was done that could be considered a further step toward a concrete decision to act in the near future.

Except—and while this confirms Mussolini's interest in Ethiopia, it also confirms the relatively long timeframe within which he intended to act—for launching, at virtually every level, a political and propaganda campaign aimed at lending greater authority to Italy's colonial claims, raising Italian public awareness of colonial issues, and directing public attention toward Ethiopia.

To properly assess Mussolini's stance during this period and grasp the connection linking the colonial and Ethiopian discourse to the new reality of the international situation and to the underlying logic of the Four-Power Pact, one must also bear in mind the highly telling fact that, in this political and propaganda campaign, the discourse was pursued in a broad, open-ended manner—that is, as an issue open to a range of possibilities. In fact, it emphasized "rights" and Italy's need for colonial expansion

and a resolution to its demographic problems in Africa, yet it did not fail to propose—even in the most authoritative forums, such as at the aforementioned Volta Conference on Europe—a whole range of alternative solutions to the mere expansion of the Italian colonial empire.

Significant in this regard is the insistence during this period on the need for a "European agreement on the African front" and a "united front of European colonization in Africa," aimed at resolving the economic crisis of the Old Continent, countering the "Yellow Peril" in Africa, and combating the incipient "colonial revolution" and "Bolshevik penetration" into the African continent through collaboration among all European countries based on a more equitable "colonial redistribution" and broad participation in the exploitation of Africa, which could also have contributed to a détente among the great powers.

In practice, the Ethiopian question did not enter a new phase until 1934. According to De Bono's diary, Mussolini, as mentioned, made the decision to act in early February, but in reality it was, for the time being, a decision in principle, which merely served to expedite the drafting of military plans to put it into practice and to initiate the first extraordinary appropriations, in April, for war preparations in Eritrea.

A decision, therefore, as Rochat acknowledges, that was not yet irreversible and—we might add—that did not envisage rapid implementation, so much so that (and we have already discussed this as well) as late as September, Mussolini still believed that the war against Ethiopia would take place in a couple of years, since it was first necessary to ensure "adequate international preparation"; and as he had written on August 10 to the top military leaders—he was convinced that, given the European situation resulting from the failure of the disarmament conference and the conflicts in the Far East, 'all Italian armed forces must be kept in a state of alert readiness in order to face, under the best possible conditions, events that may arise even suddenly, as happened at the end of last July' and that, therefore, 'any undertaking that at this moment diverts significant military forces from the European theater must be regarded as extremely harmful and as resulting in a dangerous reduction of our war potential.'

Moreover, this decision was not even backed by a clear definition of the strategic and political objectives to be achieved: was the aim to prepare for a total war, aimed at destroying the Ethiopian Empire and taking complete control of it, or a limited war, aimed at securing only certain specific territorial gains?

In this situation—if not one of uncertainty, then certainly a very open-ended one—December 30 arrived, when Mussolini issued to Badoglio, Chief of the General Staff, and his other principal collaborators the directives and the "action plan to resolve the Italian-Abyssinian question."

A reading of these directives reveals certain concepts that, strictly speaking, should be considered reflective of Mussolini's point of view and, therefore, sufficient to explain the reasons for his sudden decision to rush the process and thus to consider overcome the obstacles that, four or five months earlier, had led him to believe that action in Ethiopia was at that time "extremely" harmful and dangerous and would require a couple of years of preparation. To the point that, as stated in the first paragraph of the directives to Badoglio, he was now convinced that "The problem of Italian-Abyssinian relations has recently shifted to a different plane: from a diplomatic problem, it has become a problem of force; a 'historical' problem that must be resolved by the only means by which such problems have always been resolved: through the use of arms."

The first of these concepts concerned the internal situation in Ethiopia. For the Duce, it was

characterized by a progressive and substantial strengthening—in terms of state power, politics, and the military—of the government in Addis Ababa.

“Taking the foregoing into account,” he wrote, “we must draw the first logical conclusion: time is working against us. The longer we delay in resolving the problem, the more difficult the task will be and the greater the sacrifices will be. The second, no less logical conclusion: we must resolve the problem as soon as possible, as soon as our military preparations give us the assurance of victory.”

The second point concerned the international situation. The entire eighth paragraph was devoted to it:

An essential, though not prerequisite, condition for our action is to have a peaceful Europe behind us at least for the two-year periods 1935–36 and 1936–37, which should be the decisive period. An examination of the situation as it stands at the beginning of 1935 allows us to predict that, in the coming years, war in Europe will be avoided, just as it was avoided in July and October 1934. Factors contributing to stability include Italy’s agreements with France. These agreements avert the danger of a new German attack on Austria. On the other hand, the inevitable consequence of the Italian-French agreements is an improvement in Italian-Yugoslav relations. The political crisis will be protracted. This will weaken Belgrade for a long time, as it will have to focus on domestic political issues.

The same can be said of Germany, whose military apparatus is far from the level of efficiency required to launch military operations, not to mention the domestic reasons that advise Germany to pursue a policy of peace for some time yet. Poland, which seemed destined to become a pawn in Germany’s game, is undergoing a very marked shift toward France. This acts as a brake on the dynamism of the Third Reich. The conclusion that can be drawn from this brief analysis is that there will be a further period of peace in Europe.

From this analysis of the Ethiopian and international situation, three other extremely important concepts emerged. The first concerned the strategic and political objectives to be achieved.

In issuing his directives, Mussolini was explicit on this point:

In this war, the objective can be none other than the destruction of the Abyssinian armed forces and the total conquest of Ethiopia. An empire cannot be built any other way.

The second concerned the timing of the operation. It had to be not only decisive but also swift.

Therefore, “substantial military resources” had to be mobilized, along with “political action even within Abyssinia itself, with the aim of dividing and weakening the empire, stirring up opposition by all means among those leaders who appear dissatisfied.” All these preparations were to be completed by the fall of 1935.

Until then, “policy must prevent any incidents that could precipitate the conflict.” After that date, operations were to be carried out with the utmost energy and speed: “The faster our action, the lesser the danger of diplomatic complications. There will not even be a need to officially declare war, and, in any case, we will insist on the purely defensive nature of the operations.”

To this end, extensive use would be made of mechanized forces, aircraft, and asphyxiating gases. In the directives, the reference to the latter is indirect but no less explicit:

At least 250 aircraft must be concentrated in Eritrea and 50 in Somalia. 150 tanks in Eritrea and 50 in Somalia. Absolute artillery superiority and an abundance of ammunition…

The third concept arising from the general analysis of the international situation concerned, finally, the attitude of the other great powers.

A first significant reference to this can already be found in the seventh paragraph:

Democratic, Masonic France dealt with Abd el-Krim through a full-scale war. It took advantage of a moment when Germany was still defenseless, or nearly so.

Despite its brevity, the meaning of this historical reference is eloquent. It makes clear how Mussolini viewed the Ethiopian campaign as strictly contingent upon its completion before Germany was militarily capable of taking advantage of it to launch initiatives in Austria or elsewhere.

In the tenth paragraph (after emphasizing the need for swift and decisive action), Mussolini then outlined what—in his view—would be the Franco-British stance:

No one in Europe will create difficulties for us if the conduct of military operations quickly brings about a fait accompli. It will suffice to declare to England and France that their interests will be recognized. From a diplomatic standpoint, they are the only nations that have entered into agreements with us regarding Ethiopia. There will be no interference from the League of Nations, or if there is, it

will not prevent us from seeing the undertaking through to the end.

The final paragraph of the directives was, in fact, devoted to the domestic situation in Italy. Mussolini was also entirely optimistic about this:

No cause for concern from the “internal” standpoint. Among the Fascist masses, the conviction that the clash is inevitable is now widespread, as is the conviction that the longer we delay, the more arduous the operation becomes.

Among the youth, the “tone” is even more intense. The remnants of the old world fear “the adventure” because they believe the war would be waged according to their methods, but they are mistaken; moreover, they carry no political or social weight.

This problem has existed since 1885. Ethiopia is the last corner of Africa without European masters. The Gordian knot of Italian-Abyssinian relations is becoming increasingly tangled. It must be cut before it is too late!

Although this document appears crystal clear and, in its own way, exhaustive, it actually serves only to prove:

a) that, once “the action” had been decided, Mussolini was convinced of the need to put it into practice and conclude it as quickly as possible, and was prepared to employ all means to that end, sparing no expense. And that he was convinced:

b) that—albeit for different reasons—none of the great powers would actually oppose his initiative;

c) that the League of Nations would not take action or would be unable to do anything truly effective to prevent it;

d) that, apparently, he also seemed convinced that Ethiopia was growing stronger to such an extent that, over time, an action that at that moment did not present major difficulties would become difficult and dangerous; thus, it was his conviction:

e) that there was no other way to resolve the issue of Italian expansion in Ethiopia than through military action—on a grand scale and carried out to the end, until the complete occupation of the Ethiopian

Empire.

We believe there can be no doubt as to the sincerity of the first three convictions. We have many reservations, however, regarding the fourth and fifth.

Although there is no doubt that during 1934 reports circulated in Italian military and colonial circles that might have suggested a gradual strengthening of the government in Addis Ababa and its army, we find it difficult to believe that Mussolini truly considered the possibility of Ethiopia becoming so strong as to make an Italian military action problematic in the more distant future. Moreover, the thrust of his directives is quite the opposite: even though they began with an analysis of the Ethiopian situation, the true crux of the argument lay in the section devoted to the international situation; thus, ultimately, the decision to act was motivated solely by the reality in Europe; the fact that Ethiopia might be stronger or weaker in the future thus became irrelevant, since the essential premise would no longer hold.

Similarly, too many factors cast doubt on the sincerity of the fifth conviction as well. In reality, as will be seen, Mussolini did not at all rule out the possibility that a firm stance and skillful international negotiations might avert the conflict.

For the moment, it suffices in this regard to cite what A. Lessona wrote in his memoirs, specifically to illustrate the directives of December 30 (of which he was one of the recipients, in his capacity as Undersecretary for the Colonies):

Did Mussolini deliberately want war for war’s sake? That cannot be said.

Mussolini agreed that our relations with Ethiopia had to be definitively clarified, but he would have preferred to resolve them through peaceful means. When the Ual-Ual incident occurred, he was not thinking of war; indeed, he made demands for reparations that were quite reasonable, which Negus Neghesti—advised by the British Minister in Addis Ababa—refused to accept.

It was then that the issue, brought to the European level in Geneva, became a matter of Italy’s prestige rather than a mere colonial dispute, and it was then that the possibility of war began to be considered. But I can state in all honesty that, even after our military preparations had begun, the Head of Government would have been inclined toward a peaceful resolution of the dispute—which, by then, could no longer be limited to the Ual-Ual incident but had to encompass the entire scope of Italian-Abyssinian relations.

When General De Bono departed on January 7, 1935, to assume the post of High Commissioner in East Africa, the Duce’s final directives were to prepare vigorously for war, but he added to me: “For only by seeing us determined to see this through to the end will they be persuaded to let us resolve the matter with honor and without war.”

Beyond these points, the directives of December 30 shed no light on the matter and do nothing to explain why Mussolini believed the situation had changed so much as to make possible what had not been possible four or five months earlier. Hence the need to broaden our investigation and try to trace, so to speak, the root cause of Mussolini's decision, in order to understand the extent to which individual motivations influenced it. And, subsequently, to try to understand the reason behind the—at the very least—reluctant tone of the directives of December 30.

Various scholars, both Italian and foreign (and even at the time, certain political sectors of the international left and the anti-fascist émigré community), have argued that the true reason for Mussolini's aggression against Ethiopia lies in the dire situation and the economic and social contradictions in Italy during 1934–35. Catalano, Rochat, and Baer, for example, have expressed this view.

According to Catalano, the "Great Crisis" had been and was being felt so severely by Italy that tackling it would have required drastic measures that Mussolini and the regime were unwilling and unable to adopt. Among these measures, first and foremost, was a devaluation of the lira, which the Duce categorically rejected, because it would have amounted to a repudiation of the "quota novanta" policy and, therefore, a severe blow to his prestige—one the regime could not afford, as it would have been tantamount to setting off a bomb beneath its own feet: by devaluing the currency, he would then have had to grant wage increases to offset the inevitable rise in the cost of living; but he feared that, with these wage increases, the working classes would become more aware of themselves and their human dignity, and thus come to challenge the climate of "social peace"—that is, the suppression of the right to strike.

Hence—again according to Catalano—the logical and inevitable choice of war for fascism and Mussolini: only the path of rearmament and war, in fact, "could have restarted the Italian economic system through war contracts awarded to industries."

Along the same lines of interpretation, Rochat, on the one hand, also spoke of the war in Ethiopia as an operation by Mussolini that "formed part of his policy of non-repayable economic interventions, intended to revitalize production for a short period"; on the other hand, he saw it as arising "from the need to revive the regime, shaken by the economic crisis, through mass mobilization around a war of vast proportions and certain, overwhelming success." Mussolini's primary concern was reportedly to "invigorate" the Italian masses, to revitalize the regime through propaganda, and to recreate that climate of national mobilization in which it was easier to suppress the working classes and to exalt the middle and lower-middle classes for its own sake.

Baer's argument is not much different. For this scholar as well, the invasion of Ethiopia was essentially dictated by domestic factors linked to the economic crisis and the failure of Fascist social policy:

Almost certainly, the Ethiopian adventure was, at least in part, conceived as an alternative to social reform: it was a means of glorifying the Duce and, consequently, diverting public attention from domestic problems. In 1934, Mussolini faced growing popular discontent, which needed an outlet

before it could become a threat to the dictatorship.

Italy was severely affected by the global economic crisis of the early 1930s. It became clear that, although fascism had benefited property owners, the fascist state did not guarantee protection for workers and peasants. Added to the pressure from unemployed workers in factories and on farms was the tension that unemployment was now causing within the urban middle class: small business owners were being squeezed by the increased concentration of capital, interest rates on government bonds were falling, and members of the liberal professions and college graduates could not find employment… Instead of enjoying benefits under fascism, the Italian petty bourgeoisie, like the workers and peasants, was living in conditions of growing insecurity.

This, of course, posed a potential threat to Mussolini, who had exploited similar tensions after the war in his rise to political power… And so we come to the great turning point in the history of Italian fascism: Mussolini failed at that juncture to implement a comprehensive program of social and economic reform for Italy, and thus he had no choice but to reiterate the empty slogans of fascism: activism, militarism, and militant nationalism…

To avoid the consequences of his failure to resolve domestic political problems, Mussolini sought to rally the nation behind the conquest of Ethiopia.

Other scholars have viewed the issue in a partially or even radically different light. Some—and not only among Italians—have essentially pointed to the imperialist, fiercely nationalist, and colonialist character that, in their view, constituted the primary root, or at least one of the most defining roots, of fascism. From this perspective, it is obvious to them that Mussolini had always been waiting for the opportunity to build an empire, and it was natural for him to turn to Ethiopia—both because it was the only African country available and because, to quote Gallo, it represented for Italians a problem deeply rooted in the national consciousness (at least among the ruling class), much like the issue of Alsace and Lorraine for the French between 1871 and 1914: a problem that was always on people’s minds, even if it was not spoken of, a wound that always burned.

And it is obvious, therefore, that when Mussolini believed—after the agreements with Laval—that the opportunity had finally arrived, he threw himself into it wholeheartedly so as not to let it slip away.

Others have linked this interpretation to the one we have seen emerge—albeit in a different context—from the speeches of Rochat and Baer: the war in Ethiopia was allegedly desired by Mussolini because it responded not only to the imperialist nature of fascism but also to his need for prestige and spectacular successes upon which to base his influence over the masses and his personal power.

F. Chabod’s position can be considered typical in this regard. In discussing the reasons for the war in

Ethiopia, he wrote:

To explain the war, the newspapers claim that it is a vital necessity for Italy, given its overpopulation. The problem does exist… However, this is not the main reason that led Mussolini to launch the Ethiopian campaign; nor was it the need to find a distraction from the grave domestic economic situation. It is likely that this concern was not entirely absent but only secondary. What is essential in Mussolini's thinking, however, is the political motive—that is, the power and prestige of the nation, of Italy… What preoccupies him now is nationalism. He increasingly turns his gaze outward, his mind focused on Italy's power and prestige—which are one and the same as his own personal power and prestige. It is the inevitable law of dictatorships: external success is destined to compensate for the loss of freedom at home.

Explaining the war in Ethiopia on the basis of Italy's economic situation in 1934–35 is, in our view, arbitrary. When Mussolini decided to go to war, the crisis—as we have seen—had already subsided and was, in fact, being overcome, and it is impossible to establish a connection between the economic recovery of the Italian economy and the African conflict. Similarly, it is impossible to claim that the regime was in difficulty or even had to fear the possibility of a crisis of domestic credibility: on the contrary, at the mass level, it was enjoying its peak of popular support, and if there was anything it might have feared, it was, at most, precisely that this support might be undermined by the prospect of a war—especially if it appeared to be protracted, economically burdensome, and costly in human lives, and such as to expose Italy to serious complications with the other great powers.

In purely abstract terms, the conquest of the empire could certainly have been seen as a prospect that would have invigorated certain sectors of the party and the Fascist youth; in practice, however—while bearing in mind the importance Mussolini attached to the issue of youth—it is nevertheless excessive to think that this alone would have been sufficient to induce the Duce to undertake a venture that provoked resistance and opposition among large sectors of the regime's leadership and sparked fears throughout the country.

The broad unity around the regime during the sanctions and the enthusiasm following the initial military victories and the triumphant conclusion of the conflict should not, in fact, be misleading: as we will see later, at first—that is, before it became clear that the reaction of the great powers would not go beyond moral condemnation and economic sanctions—there was no shortage of fears and criticism regarding Mussolini's initiative.

Similarly, even explanations based on the fiercely nationalist and imperialist nature of fascism and on Mussolini's need for prestige and success—while undoubtedly valid—are not, in and of themselves, sufficient. While the role of both these factors is taken for granted, the very specific—and, for us, decisive—fact remains that the Ethiopian campaign could indeed elevate Mussolini and fascism to the highest possible level domestically, but it could also lead to their downfall and, with it, reduce Italy to a Balkan-level power. And this could not have escaped Mussolini's notice, especially at a time when the regime was solid—and there was therefore no need to go all in to keep it afloat—and the international situation was not so compromised and polarized as to require a man like Mussolini to make an

immediate, non-postponable decision or commitment.

Hence our conviction that it is impossible to seek an explanation for the war in Ethiopia solely in terms of domestic politics. These factors undoubtedly cannot be denied or underestimated, whether on an ideological-cultural level or a psychological one; however, the underlying explanation—the one that truly allows us to understand the logic behind Mussolini's decision—must be sought not in domestic political motives but, essentially, in foreign policy motives. It must be sought in the conviction that Mussolini had come to hold—namely, that only at that moment could none of the great powers prevent him from expanding into Ethiopia, and that from their behavior in response to his initiative, he would be able to form a precise idea of their future attitude not only toward Italy but also toward fascism.

The primary reason for the decision Mussolini made in his directives of December 30, 1934—that is, at the very moment when he was certain that the agreement with France would be formally concluded in a few days—lies in the Duce's conviction:

a) that with the Franco-Italian agreement, the balance of power in Europe—both real and, above all, political (for while France was undoubtedly militarily stronger than Germany, it could not, for a whole series of subjective and objective reasons, assert its strength)—was finally being established, a balance that would make Italy's role decisive, especially with regard to France's security;

b) that at that moment, given the disproportion between the actual forces in Europe, Italy could limit itself to exerting its decisive influence in political terms—that is, without having to commit fully in terms of military presence on the Old Continent;

c) that this dual favorable reality was, however, destined to change as German rearmament (which had already begun) became a reality;

d) that if Italy wished to expand into Ethiopia, that was the only possible moment to do so, since Germany was not yet strong enough to take advantage of Italy's military commitment in Africa, nor even to threaten Italy's positions in Austria and Hungary, and France and England could not prevent it, because—especially the former—they were convinced they could not do without Italy's friendship and alliance against Germany;

e) that—despite this conviction—neither France nor England would ever have voluntarily consented to a substantial strengthening of Italy, both because it was objectively contrary to their interests and because it would have created for their governments numerous and varied difficulties—domestic, international, and of principle;

f) that, under these circumstances, Italy had no choice but to force the hand of Paris and London, compelling them to accept a unilateral Italian initiative, without, however, harming their direct interests in Ethiopia, and, on the contrary, explicitly guaranteeing them, so as to involve them as much as possible in the entire operation and at the same time demonstrate to them Rome's willingness to make it a test case for their shared friendship and solidarity.

Based on the available documentation, it is impossible to say with certainty whether, in deciding on the action in Ethiopia, Mussolini took into account the possibility that Paris and, above all, London would react to the attempt to force their hand in the way they ultimately did. Although various factors suggest that he did not expect such a harsh reaction, it is nevertheless difficult to believe that Mussolini thought England would accept his initiative without batting an eye.

For he was deeply convinced that politics and international relations were based exclusively on considerations of power, expediency, and prestige. Moreover, his modus operandi in the early months of 1935 (especially with regard to England but also to France) reveals a desire not to lay his cards on the table and to buy time, which suggests that he was seriously considering the possibility of a negative reaction, at least from London.

That said, it is nevertheless highly probable that he initially deluded himself into believing that British realism and Laval's good offices—whose policy required Italian friendship and which, indeed, clearly tended to transform that friendship into a full-fledged alliance—would, if not exactly pave the way for him, certainly spared him from having to face insurmountable difficulties—perhaps even the use of arms—helping him find a formula that—while safeguarding their interests—would ensure Italy effective direct and indirect control over Ethiopia, without having to formally oust the Negus's government (that is, a formula similar to those that had secured France's possession of Morocco and England's control of Egypt). This does not, however, rule out a priori the possibility that from the very beginning he had also anticipated the worst-case scenario and had already considered the whole matter from the perspective of what we have defined as the "calculated risk" of a very serious crisis with London and perhaps with Paris—a crisis which, moreover, he did not believe could reach its extreme consequences given the reality of the European situation.

What is certain, in any case, is that he must have believed that at that moment the best course of action for him was to project confidence and resolve and leave it to others to decide on further moves, limiting himself, for his part, to exploiting the Ual-Ual incident—both to gauge the intentions of the British and the French and to prepare Italian public opinion for the possibility of a future conflict, thereby overcoming the resistance and fears that his African policy was arousing even at the very top of the regime.

The final months of 1935 and the first half of 1936 saw the Italian people rallying around Mussolini and the regime as never before, in a sort of collective elation and enthusiasm that grew as military victories and the difficulties faced by the League of Nations and the governments in London and Paris fueled patriotic fervor and national pride. As already mentioned, however, public opinion in the early months of 1935 was mixed. Certainly, even at that time, there were those who were immediately swept up by the prospect of building an empire, avenging Adwa, showing the world what Italy was truly capable of, and finally establishing the dominance of fascism on the world stage.

Similarly, from the very beginning, there were also—especially among the middle class—those who, while realizing the gravity and risks of the moment and without resorting to exalted or hysterical rhetoric, viewed the possibility of expansion into Ethiopia favorably and ascribed to it a significance rooted in values that, while undoubtedly fascist, were also deeply embedded in a much older national-patriotic tradition and culture.

The position of R. Paolucci, as reflected in his memoirs, can be considered typical in this regard:

I was in favor of the war in Ethiopia. I had grown up as a child in the atmosphere of Adwa; I had witnessed my father's suffering during the sad period that followed that defeat, to which Italian valor had been completely unrelated—my father had been in Massawa in his distant youth. Perhaps in Ethiopia, without taking anything away from the other European nations, we could have found an

outlet and work for our burgeoning population.

However, there were also many—even among the Fascists—who, in those months, looked to the future with concern and fear, far from convinced that it was really so important to carve out an empire, especially at such an economically unfavorable time and, above all, given the risk of serious and perhaps dramatic repercussions on international relations.

The threat of German revanchism—dramatically brought to the forefront by the events in Austria in July 1934—led many to wonder whether it was really wise to jeopardize good relations with those who, in case of need, were supposed to be Italy's natural allies against Germany. Nor—especially at the grassroots level—were the simplest and most basic reactions absent, those typical of ordinary men and women faced with the prospect of war; a war, moreover, not to defend their own borders, but to be fought in distant and practically unknown lands.

Police documents from those months reveal, in this regard, a reality that—while not to be exaggerated—was certainly different from the one portrayed by the regime's propaganda and one that has often been accepted by historians as well. While it is natural that the first rumors of war offered militant anti-fascists (especially the Communists and the Liberation Group) the opportunity to try to revive—albeit with very modest results—their activities and to exploit the threat of war for the sake of their own struggle, and while it is also understandable that the first mobilization measures (concerning the 1911 draft class) led to cases of draft evasion and clandestine emigration, especially among ethnic minorities—both Germans from South Tyrol and Slovenes from the Julian March.

More significant for assessing the state of mind of part of the population is the fact that during this period, the police found themselves having to deal, across virtually all social levels, with a whole series of "rumors," "spreading of false news," "manifestations of defeatism," "hoarding and speculation on foodstuffs," and "panic." In some localities, especially in southern Italy, there were even cases of printed leaflets with a clearly pacifist nature being distributed. In Benevento, for example, a "prayer to St. Anthony for all the soldiers and Abyssinia" was circulated, the first stanza of which read as follows:

O beautiful, you who have already heard

who are true Christians

say a prayer

for all these soldiers

so that, when this decree

because this decree is coming out

Pray to Saint Anthony

that this war won’t happen

Let everyone pray

Don’t let Vita be defeated

Every evening, a Vemmaria

against these Abyssinian soldiers.

And that these incidents were not merely isolated but reflected a fairly widespread sentiment seems to us to be demonstrated not only by the numerous traces that remain in police records and even in diplomatic documents, but also by two documents which, given their origin, attest to the concern that the recognition of such a sentiment must have aroused among the authorities and the most politically astute and sensitive Fascists.

The first is a confidential memo titled “Rumors Concerning the Troops in East Africa” that Carmine Senise felt it necessary—tellingly—to forward on June 20, 1935, to the Undersecretariat for the Press and Propaganda, evidently to suggest the points on which to focus their clarification efforts:

The state of public opinion regarding the now certain military campaign in East Africa is not entirely satisfactory. Aside from the already noted financial and economic apprehensions that trouble those who have something to lose, a sense of unease and disappointment is also widespread among numerous other segments of the population.

I have already stated in my previous reports that in both circles there are numerous exceptions—those who believe or hope to gain something—but in general it can be said that public opinion is not, under these circumstances, favorable to the government. There is a distinct feeling that, ultimately, this is a military expedition of conquest on our part, and there is a tendency to side with rather than against the criticisms—reported by our newspapers—that have appeared in the foreign press regarding us. In short, despite the political acumen of the Italian people, there is a complete lack of understanding of the underlying causes that have led the government to its current stance and that may also justify the lesser regard for many humanitarian conventions.

Among the educated people here, there is no shortage of individuals capable of understanding and assessing, with political insight, the importance of these profound reasons behind the Italian government's actions. But these people are a tiny minority.

For the vast majority of the public, there has been—and still is—a lack of intelligent guidance, which in this case should be provided by the Italian press. These shortcomings—which are almost as significant as any deficiencies that might be found in the realm of technical preparedness—were brought to my attention just the other day by Mr. Carlo Prochownick, who is a good friend of several senior officers, including His Excellency General Zoppi, Commander of the Army. Prochownick told me, in fact, that several other officers had pointed out to him the lack of logical and moral coherence in the press's approach to guiding public opinion in this situation.

Talk of Abyssinian provocations is regarded by the public as a childish pretext, insufficient in any case to justify a war. Referring to the future liberation of two million slaves makes no sense in and of itself unless it is accompanied by a vast work program aimed at organizing and channeling the mass of labor thus made available toward useful ends.

Finally, the military occupation itself—which appears inevitable to everyone—and the establishment of a sort of Italian protectorate in Abyssinia should have been openly declared to the people, highlighting the enormous benefits that may, in the future, accrue to us and to the Abyssinians themselves. There is therefore much to be done in this case, differently and more effectively than has been done so far.

The second document is a “highly confidential” letter written by Farinacci to Mussolini on February 8, shortly after preparations had begun to send the first units of the Blackshirts to Africa. It reads:

Since many lack the courage to tell you this—simply out of fear of not being sufficiently disciplined—allow me, with the utmost affection and devotion, to inform you of the mood that is developing following the order to dispatch Black Shirt battalions to Abyssinia.

Of the group based in Milan, only the Cuneo Battalion is currently scheduled to depart, and I consider it the least prepared in terms of Fascist ideology.

Regardless of the political maturity of these units, there is also a moral issue that must be addressed. The battalions are not made up solely of bold young men ready for anything, but also of older men—those with families for whom they are the sole provider.

It will be inevitable that, when the order to depart is given to the Cuneo Battalion, many Black Shirts will rush to request exemption, citing numerous family and health issues.

Knowing you as well as I do, I can already imagine your outburst: “But then what good are the battalions if, when it comes time to serve the country, they create a thousand difficulties?”

But, dear President, one cannot fail to admit that a defensive war or a war in Europe is one thing, while a colonial expedition taking place far, far away is quite another—and that the journey, the climate, diseases, etc., etc., make it—at least in the minds of families—more difficult and worrisome.

So, instead of watching a battalion depart amid the tears of children, wives, mothers, and so on—at the expense of the enthusiasm that should inspire both those leaving and those remaining—why not create an entirely new battalion by selecting, from the various battalions of the Group, the most enthusiastic young men, those least burdened by family obligations and therefore best suited?

Under the pretext that every province must be represented, you would have a homogeneous unit of volunteers capable of maximum performance. And this would foster a spirit of emulation among the young people of the various provinces, which would help keep everyone’s enthusiasm alive. Should a second or third battalion be needed, the same system could be followed.

I have spoken with Generals and senior officers of the Militia, and they all share this view.

Decisive factors in bringing about the transition (through a process of liberation) from this state of mind marked by concern and fear to that of patriotic enthusiasm and nationalistic exaltation that characterized the last months of 1935 and the entire first half of 1936 were—as has been said—the realization that the danger of a direct confrontation with England was receding and disappearing, and the military victories over the Ethiopians.

To properly assess the scope of these two successive states of mind—the fact that the first remained essentially latent and then dissipated, while the second, on the other hand, grew and erupted in forms

and manifestations unparalleled throughout the entire duration of the regime—one must, however, bear in mind the extremely important role that the regime's propaganda apparatus played throughout the entire period of preparation for war, with regard to the attitude of the masses and its evolution.

Never before had Fascism succeeded in mobilizing and fully exploiting the opportunities afforded by its monopoly on information and by modern techniques of mass propaganda as it did on this occasion. Every tool was utilized to the fullest: the press, radio, cinema, mass organizations, schools, and so on. Every category of citizen was targeted. Every psychological and cultural chord was struck. Every argument was employed in every possible tone, from the most subtle to the crudest.

However, there were two levers on which the greatest emphasis was placed: national pride and the hope for a better future that the "selfishness" and "fear" of the "rich nations" would stubbornly seek to deny Italy. The great powers—and even many smaller states—possessed veritable empires from which they derived great wealth; only Italy lacked one, and others sought to deny it this despite the fact that Italy desperately needed it to provide land and work for its ever-growing population.

Among the many arguments put forward, this was undoubtedly one of the most successful: for many Italians, Ethiopia became the land where they would finally be able to have that plot of land, that farm they lacked at home—and thanks to which their children—like those of the British, the French, the Belgians, and the Dutch—would enjoy a better economic status than they themselves did.

In his diary, Corrado Alvaro recounts how soldiers went to Africa carrying a "bag of seeds of a selected and familiar variety": this brief note holds one of the keys to understanding what the war in Ethiopia meant for so many Italians and the consensus that formed around it.

Another widely circulated argument was that of a supposed Ethiopian threat against Eritrea and Somalia. Finally, one cannot overlook a whole other series of arguments revolving around the contrast between "Italian, Roman, and Christian civilization" and "Ethiopian barbarism and slavery"—and, consequently, the work of progress that Italy was said to be carrying out in Africa.

As the situation became increasingly polarized, however, the central theme shifted more and more toward British "selfishness" and "treachery" (perfidious Albion!) and institutional anti-fascism, symbolized by the figure of Eden. Especially in the second half of 1935, anti-British rhetoric became the cornerstone of the regime's propaganda campaign.

The contradictions in British policy and some of its psychologically misguided moves—which were impractical— such as the dispatch of the Home Fleet to the Mediterranean for purely demonstrative purposes, provided excellent ammunition for this polemic, making it—at virtually every level—a decisive factor in mobilizing and heightening national pride and nationalistic fervor, and contributed significantly to rallying ever-greater support around Mussolini.

D'Annunzio's behavior is a typical example. At first, the poet—entirely consumed as he was by hatred for "that swine Adolf Hitler" and love for his "Latin sister" France—had viewed Mussolini's African policy with concern and suspicion; if he later changed his attitude, it was precisely because of the growing hatred within him toward the "treacherous English."

"My legionnaires from Fiume," he wrote on January 21, 1936, to an old comrade-in-arms, "are all leaving for bilingual Africa. At first, I used to criticize their excessive zeal, trying to convince them that this was not a national war, but merely a colonial one. Today, the British's dull-wittedness, their vile

greed, and their stubborn injustice drive me to declare it a national war—indeed, a Latin war—indeed, a Roman one."

And, at the popular level, how can we fail to recall once again Alvaro's diary?

Nor, to get a complete picture of those months, can we underestimate the influence that the Church's stance had on the direction of public opinion.

Officially, the Holy See maintained a neutral stance throughout the Ethiopian affair. Pius XI, during the secret consistory of April 1, 1935, lamented that the horizon was "darkened by threatening clouds and streaked with sinister flashes" and said that a war would be an "enormous" crime and a manifestation of "mad" fury; and again, at the end of July, he reaffirmed his hope "in the peace of Christ." A month later, he reiterated this hope once more.

In essence, however, the Holy See's position was always, in fact, favorable to Italian policy, even though officially the Vatican sought to avoid compromising itself with overly one-sided public statements and stances, which, moreover, would have been unwelcome to significant sectors of the Catholic world outside Italy. Those who, on the other hand, from the very beginning committed themselves substantially and increasingly explicitly in favor of Mussolini's policies were, almost without exception, the episcopate, the clergy, the Catholic press, and, following in their wake, a large part of the Catholic lay organizations.

Statements to this effect were already quite numerous by 1935 and were such that they could not fail to have a profound influence on the faithful and on public opinion in general, given that they endorsed many of the arguments being put forward at the same time by the regime's propaganda. This was all the more so because among their authors were also religious and laypeople who, until a few years earlier, had held a critical or even hostile attitude toward the regime. Especially in the final months, around the time military operations began, the Catholic world's alignment was essentially total, and efforts to distinguish the Catholic position from the Fascist one were reduced to such a minimal extent that they were practically imperceptible to the public.

One quote, among the many that could be cited, seems particularly telling to us. Taken from the homily delivered on October 28, 1935, in Milan Cathedral by Cardinal Schuster, it reads:

Nothing is more totalitarian than life itself. If, therefore, the catechism taught in schools by the will of the Duce represents the doctrine and the Faith of the Italians, then nothing that is at all at odds with the morality of the Gospel—or that simply poses a danger to public morals—should be admitted into the education of the youth or the life of the Nation. This, above all, is the collaboration that Jesus Christ demands of us: "Dei sumus adiutores." This is the collaboration that the Fatherland demands of us, if it is indeed true that in the new Italy the citizen is identified with the Catholic, and that the doctrine taught in schools by the will of the legislature must also be in harmony with the life lived by all citizens by the grace of God and by the will of the Nation—this very goodwill of the Nation that the Fatherland needs to resolve, for example, the serious demographic problem. And it will resolve it by educating young people in purity and by protecting the union of husband and wife against all the temptations of art and industry.

To this very goodwill of men is divinely promised a reward, which the present hour makes especially desirable and precious. Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis: Peace to men of good will.

This will for the good, however, constitutes in turn a twofold duty for all of us: a duty as Christians and a duty as citizens. A contradiction between the school and state society, between Catholic, Apostolic, Roman doctrine and Italian life—which is made whole only in communion with God, with Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Dante, and which becomes all-encompassing only through adherence to Catholic morality alongside Manzoni, Volta, and Christopher Columbus—is by no means tolerable.

“Dei sumus adiutores.” May this be the spiritual fruit of today’s solemnity. Let us therefore cooperate with God in this national and Catholic mission of good, especially at this moment when, on the fields of Ethiopia, the Italian flag triumphantly bears the Cross of Christ, breaks the chains of the slaves, and paves the way for the Missionaries of the Gospel. Let us cultivate this goodwill within ourselves and in others, and God will grant us the reward: peace. “Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.” That is, He will grant the peace that Isaiah describes as the exclusive fruit of justice: “Opus iustitiae pax”—peace to the fallen, who, however, breathed their last in the fulfillment of their duty and in the Faith and grace of Jesus Christ. Peace and protection to the valiant army, which, obedient and undaunted under the command of the Fatherland, opens the gates of Ethiopia to the Catholic Faith and Roman civilization at the cost of blood. Peace to all in truth, charity, and justice, according to the venerated words of the Supreme Pontiff; that peace, I say, which from the City of the Seven Hills—already consecrated by the Blood of Peter and Paul—like a fertile river, has for 20 centuries now been flowing from Rome to the world, proclaiming that Word which abolishes slavery, dispels the darkness of barbarism, gives God to the peoples, and floods the world with religious civilization and true goodness. This is the perpetual mission of Catholic Italy and of that Rome of Dante’s, where Christ is Roman.

In this atmosphere, when Italian troops attacked Ethiopia in early October and the League of Nations imposed economic sanctions, while there were still significant segments of public opinion concerned about the consequences of Mussolini’s action and far from convinced of its wisdom, the majority of the country was already on board. The middle class, in particular, was largely on board, having become more fascist in its outlook and more receptive to patriotic and nationalistic appeals. The Catholic community was also largely on board.

Areas of uncertainty, however, were present mainly among the working class, especially among workers in the major industrial centers and, in particular, among the elderly—since fascist influence was already significant among the young (in addition to concerns directly related to the war, there were widespread fears that the sanctions might affect employment)—as well as in certain intellectual circles and specific sectors of the business world. The outbreak of hostilities, however, brought about a further shift in the situation.

At the level, so to speak, of undifferentiated public opinion—the masses—faced with the realization

that the war remained confined to Ethiopia and was proceeding victoriously, concerns dissipated within a few weeks and were replaced by a mood of euphoric consensus and exhilarating nationalism that swept through a large part of the working class as well, so much so that a few months later *Lo stato operaio* had to acknowledge that “fascism has, for the time being, succeeded in fanaticizing not only broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie but also a not insignificant portion of the proletarian youth. Fascism’s demagogic slogans, in the particular Italian situation, have succeeded in sweeping along broad strata of the working population.”

Among those sectors of the ruling class that had until then maintained a critical and skeptical stance, the reality of the war now underway triggered a moral outpouring of patriotism—the duty of every citizen to place the Fatherland above all else and to sacrifice themselves for it if necessary; whether just or unjust, opportune or inopportune, the war now put at stake the very destiny of Italy, its future, and its place among other nations: for the overwhelming majority of the Italian ruling class—raised and nurtured in the cult of national values and the national-patriotic tradition of the Risorgimento—this eliminated every other problem at its root and, in certain cases, made the moral commitment even stronger: a sort of sacrifice of one’s individual personality to the collective identity of the Fatherland; a Fatherland that, as such, transcended fascism itself.

Unless one understands this moral situation (which, as we shall see, was largely replicated in 1940 as well), it is impossible to truly grasp why the war in Ethiopia fostered such widespread unity among Italians that it even involved or touched many people who were not fascists and sometimes even anti-fascists. One fails to understand—or, worse, misinterprets (by labeling it opportunism)—that men who were certainly not fascists went to fight as volunteers in Africa, convinced that in doing so they were making the greatest possible sacrifice for the Fatherland and, perhaps, contributing to a future transformation of the regime. It is not understood why a man like V. E. Orlando felt the need to publicly declare that at that moment “every Italian must be present to serve”; why General R. Bencivenga wrote to Mussolini:

I read that all the forces of foreign anti-fascism are “coalescing” as a result of the Italian-Ethiopian affair. Although it seems superfluous to me, I nevertheless ask Your Excellency to take note that I reject any solidarity with those forces, since the fortune and security of the Fatherland are at stake.

And why B. Croce, while explicitly stating that he did not approve of “the government’s policy,” accepted— “in homage to the name of the Fatherland”—the Senate President’s invitation to contribute his senator’s medal to the gold collection campaign promoted by the regime in response to the sanctions.

Unless one penetrates this atmosphere and identifies and understands its various components and how they interact, one risks failing to grasp the climate that was developing around the Ethiopian affair in 1935 and, more importantly, the significance that this climate had not only in shaping the large rallies and popular demonstrations that accompanied the approach of the conflict, the entry into the war, the sanctions, the first military victories—or the success of major initiatives by the regime that were essentially political and propagandistic in nature, such as the “Day of Faith” (December 18) and the

collection of gold and iron “for the Fatherland,” but one also prevents oneself from properly assessing how and to what extent this atmosphere, in turn, influenced the political leadership at the top of the regime, the international arena, and Mussolini himself.

To assess how the Ethiopian campaign was viewed at the highest levels of the regime, one must first consider the king’s attitude.

Umberto II declared that it constituted the “happy… culmination of an initiative that a united Italy had begun to carry out many decades earlier” and that, on that occasion, the agreement between the Crown and Mussolini was “complete.”

Various episodes can be cited in support of this assertion. There is no doubt, for example, that when the British side attempted to draw a polemical distinction between the Fascist government and the Italian nation, Victor Emmanuel III seized the first public opportunity to reply just as polemically that the Italian government was the king’s government, just as the king’s government was the Italian government, and that on the “Day of Faith,” Queen Elena wished to be the first to offer her own faith.

These episodes, however, occurred after the start of military operations and, in any case, cannot be considered particularly significant, as they were, so to speak, nothing more than acts that were simply expected. Far more important is the fact that the king gave his approval to Mussolini’s decision to launch military operations even though he knew that there were many who were uncertain or opposed to the move within both the military and regime hierarchies, and that he did so, on September 30, in no uncertain terms and, it seems, without making a fuss over the fact that Mussolini had asked for his approval after having already given De Bono the order to launch the attack on October 3:

I knew, Your Excellency, almost everything you have candidly told me. I am also aware of the opposition—cautious but strong—that has spread among your principal collaborators. I have been informed, and I know the names of many generals and admirals who are overly fearful and argumentative. Well then: now that the British are in our waters and believe they have frightened us, now your old King tells you: “Duce, go ahead: I am behind you… Go ahead, I tell you!”

However, we cannot stop at this observation alone. Too many facts, in fact, show that Victor Emmanuel was long opposed to the Ethiopian campaign, and this therefore makes it necessary to explain why he ultimately changed his mind.

The king’s hostility is documented first and foremost in De Bono’s diary. In it, under the date of February 15, 1934, we read:

The King appeared concerned about the danger of war with Abyssinia; the Prime Minister wanted me to reassure him, and for this reason I was received half an hour before the signing 15 days ago. On that occasion, I also mentioned the trip to Somalia: he was pleased, but he always fears that something

might happen in Europe.

And in the entry dated July 18, 1934:

The King… having been informed of what is being done, is not pleased and has written to Mussolini. It is understandable: in every adventure, what is at stake for kings is the Crown.

Another reference can be found in Marshal Caviglia's diary, dated February 21, 1935:

It seems that the war with Abyssinia has been decided… But what surprises me is the King's conduct. In an audience I arranged last year, after his return from Asmara, he spoke to me in a manner clearly opposed to a war with Abyssinia. "They are deluding themselves," he told me, "into thinking that Abyssinia is divided among many ras at war with one another. What will happen instead is that, once we are at war, they will all unite against us." Concerned about the consequences of war, I agreed with his view. The example of 1896—foreseen by Baldissera as early as 1889—is a striking one. Then the King said: "At this moment, we must not weaken our position in Europe, and the difficulties involved in a major war are many and protracted, and they grow more severe the farther we move from our bases of operations. The scarcity of water limits the deployment of the overwhelming military force we possess in Italy, and even our air force achieves lesser moral and material effects on those populations."

However, during my last audience with him last December, the King seemed to me to have changed.

His visit to Somalia had altered his views.

In reality, contrary to what Caviglia thought, the trip to Somalia had not at all led the King to change his views. In fact, it was precisely in Somalia that he had told the governor of that colony that the Abyssinian campaigns were not to his liking and that, rather, it was necessary to keep our eyes and hands ready in Europe."

This was precisely his greatest concern—a concern that not even the Italian-French agreements of January 1935 dispelled, given that, above all, Victor Emmanuel personally distrusted the French and believed that Mussolini trusted them too much. Significant is the alarm that the remilitarization of the Rhineland would have aroused in him, to the point of prompting him to press Mussolini to consider the advisability of seeking a resolution to the Ethiopian conflict.

If we add to this concern his fears regarding direct risks (of a military nature, in Ethiopia) and indirect risks (with England), as well as the necessary economic effort—and the fact that he was well aware of how the Duce's policies aroused perplexity and concern not only within the country but also among a large part of the military hierarchy and even among some prominent Fascist figures (some, such as Giuriati, went so far as to speak to him of a "national disaster" that would ensue), it is easy to understand why, for much of 1935, the sovereign did not encourage Mussolini's policy and made no secret of his fears regarding it.

Determining precisely when Victor Emmanuel changed his mind and ultimately accepted Mussolini's vision is, given the current state of the documentation, impossible. What we believe can be said is that in early August he must still have been seriously concerned that England might respond to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia by becoming directly involved.

This seems to be evidenced by the fact that on August 7 he felt the need to write to Mussolini:

It is my fervent hope that you will find a way to avoid a violent clash with England. This would be a matter of the utmost gravity for Italy, one that would outweigh any doubts one might harbor regarding France's attitude. I am of the opinion that, if France were to choose between our friendship and that of Great Britain, it would ultimately choose the latter.

And that, some fifteen days later, Victor Emmanuel still did not share Mussolini's conviction that—in the end—England would not take action or—at most—would merely limit itself to having the League of Nations approve the imposition of economic sanctions, seems to us to be a logical conclusion based on the fact that, around August 20, a group of influential senators, including Badoglio (people, therefore, who must not only have been aware of the sovereign's long-standing concerns but also known that he still harbored them), set out to intervene on his behalf to put a stop to Mussolini's "intransigence."

According to an intelligence report from about ten days later:

From a prominent member of the Justinian Masonic Lodge, we have learned that around August 20 of last year in Rome—while His Excellency the Head of Government was at the site of the Army's major maneuvers—a number of senators, who were affiliated with Fascism but who were generally opposed to the Duce's policies, to examine our country's situation regarding foreign relations and to take a step toward His Majesty the King of Italy in order to clarify their own responsibilities in the event that the

Head of Government persisted—in defiance of every attempt at conciliation offered to Italy—in facing the risks of war in Abyssinia."

According to our confidential informant, in addition to the Honorable Federzoni, the meeting was attended by Senator Casati, Caviglia Badoglio, and others known to be loyal to the monarchy, whose names were not disclosed. After carefully examining the domestic situation in light of our economic and financial capabilities, as well as the communist and anti-fascist propaganda that has become more pronounced in the country—given that "Mussolini's policy of intransigence would lead to Italy's complete isolation and the consequent formation of a powerful bloc of anti-fascist states that would make our war more difficult and more arduous"—they reportedly resolved to take a collective step toward the King to suggest to him, in the interest of the nation's future, to advise the Duce to adopt a less harsh and less provocative course of action toward Great Britain and the Geneva-based organization, contenting ourselves for now with whatever might come our way through diplomatic channels and postponing the implementation of our colonial expansion program until a more favorable time."

At the same meeting, someone would have put forward the proposal to let the King know that it would be advisable—given that many states, in dealing with our country, take an anti-fascist stance as a precondition and even demand the replacement of the current Mussolini regime—to remove the Duce from the helm of the state and hand it over to a man who enjoys foreign sympathy: Mussolini, so as not to destroy his myth, would become Prime Minister without portfolio, and all the ministries he currently holds would be entrusted to capable men prepared to assume his responsibilities during this difficult period the Duce is going through.

The Senate Commission would impose—or may have already imposed—this condition on His Majesty the King, presenting him with a dilemma: "Either you accept our proposals, or from this moment on we decline all responsibility—every responsibility—for whatever may happen within the country during or after the war that Mussolini is about to unleash."

Based on these facts, it seems highly likely to us that Victor Emmanuel III's alignment with Mussolini's position was effectively achieved only on the eve of the decision to commence hostilities. If, as we believe, this was the timeline, it seems highly probable that the monarch's change of attitude was influenced not only by the persuasiveness of Mussolini's arguments and his self-assurance (whose clarity of thought the king genuinely admired) but also by other factors: the reaction stirred in him by England's show of force—the dispatch of the Home Fleet to the Mediterranean— a move that he—as Mussolini knew—was in reality merely a bluff, since the British ships were technically incapable of engaging in a potential conflict; and the awareness that domestic public opinion was increasingly in favor of war and that, at this point, it would have been difficult and perhaps dangerous for the Crown to stop Mussolini.

Finally, one must not underestimate the fact that the king must have been aware that within the Armed Forces themselves there were factions that viewed the prospect of war favorably and that, therefore, it could not be ruled out that his digging in his heels at the last moment might have sparked friction and conflicting opinions within their ranks.

It is well known that there was hostility within the military hierarchy toward Mussolini's Ethiopian policy, and the Duce not only had to acknowledge this but had foreseen it from the very moment he began to consider it. Indeed, to maintain as much control over the situation as possible, as early as 1933 he had taken steps to personally assume control of the three military ministries (as he did in January 1935 with the Ministry of the Colonies) and to appoint as undersecretaries three men (Baistrocchi, Cavagnari, and Valle) chosen from among those closest to Fascism—whom he also appointed the following year as chiefs of staff of their respective branches of the armed forces—in order to centralize as much power as possible in their hands and thereby minimize conflicts and dualism in the management of military policy.

After all, it was only natural that there would be critics and opponents of military action in Ethiopia within the Armed Forces. In addition to the reasons shared by other circles, for a significant number of generals and admirals, a potential conflict in Ethiopia had to be viewed negatively—both because of its technical difficulties, because it would weaken Italy's military presence in Europe, and because of the fear that it would lead to greater Fascist interference in the Armed Forces.

Finally, one should not underestimate the fact that many military officers were influenced by the sovereign's anti-war stance.

Apart from a somewhat cryptic (and not very precise) mention by Lessona in his memoirs, no one, however, has expanded the discussion to address the question of whether, beyond individual cases, there was any difference in attitude among the three branches of the military.

Concerns and hostility were particularly strong within the Army. Even Baistrocchi—whom some considered "the true victor" of the Ethiopian War, due to the dedication he brought to its organization, his decisiveness, and his lack of the hesitations and fears that instead gripped Badoglio during operations when faced with certain difficulties—had his doubts at the very beginning. For a long time, however, Badoglio was the most hostile.

From the very beginning—when the Ethiopian plan was still vague and, above all, no specific deadlines had been set, and therefore his task was essentially to review and refine the operational plans prepared under De Bono's direction (a task he completed in the summer of '34), made no secret whatsoever of his aversion to the idea of attacking Ethiopia and his tendency, in any case, to try to postpone it as long as possible. From a technical standpoint, the criticisms he leveled at the prepared plans and the substantial modifications he made to them (consider that De Bono had planned to deploy, in addition to those already in the colony, 60,000 indigenous soldiers and 20,000 Italian nationals, while Badoglio planned for 30,000 and 100,000 respectively, with extensive use of ground and air assets) were beyond reproach. However, his estimate that three years would be needed to complete the preparations was absolutely excessive. Nor, in this initial phase, did Badoglio limit himself to trying to push everything as far into the future as possible.

In fact, his official correspondence from this period shows that, on the one hand, he insisted on the need to act in concert with France and England and, on the other hand, made no secret of his hostility

toward the planned operation, citing a whole series of arguments.

Significant in this regard is what he wrote (most likely speaking on behalf of what he knew to be the sovereign's point of view) on May 12, 1934, to De Bono:

War with Abyssinia is an event that we will have to face if forced to do so, but which, even with an outcome fully in our favor, will always represent an extremely burdensome effort for the country.

Even rough estimates put the cost at close to six billion, that is, roughly one-third of our gold reserves. This figure alone suffices to illustrate just how grave a task we would be undertaking, given the current state of our finances.

Such a severe drain on our finances will mean that all the equipment (supplies, ammunition, horses, etc.) that has been worn out during the campaign can only be replaced very slowly within the army's inventory, as happened during the Libyan expedition.

The army will therefore face a twofold crisis: during operations, due to the significant diversion of forces; and after the campaign, due to the slow replenishment of supplies.

This is a highly delicate situation, particularly at times such as the present—and as they are likely to be in the near future—when political instability can lead to very rapid changes in circumstances, requiring every state to be at the full strength of its resources.

In conclusion, the concentration of our efforts in Africa will have the immediate consequence of making us less effective in Europe for a rather long time.

We must also bear in mind the benefits we could derive from such an action. There is no doubt that in the event—and I repeat, a highly probable event—of our success, we would silence Abyssinian ambitions for at least fifty years; which is certainly to be regarded as a highly appreciable result.

Less favorable, however, is the prospect of a possible expansion of our colony, since—aside from the meager returns that the lands we already know as far as Amba Alagi are likely to yield—the colonial budget is already in great difficulty due to the ever-increasing needs of our current colonies and would

have to draw further sums from our already exhausted finances to promptly equip the newly conquered territory. It is precisely appropriate here to ask whether the game is worth the candle.

I have taken the liberty of submitting these considerations for Your Excellency's review in order to reach the following conclusion: it is not in our interest to deliberately provoke a war with Abyssinia; rather, we must prepare ourselves with the dual purpose of ensuring that our preparations deter any ambitions the enemy may have and, in the worst-case scenario, enable us to emerge victorious from the conflict.

This concept, in my view, must be the guiding principle for our course of action toward Abyssinia—a course of action imbued with a high sense of national pride, yet without ever resorting to acts that would make a rupture inevitable, if such an eventuality can be avoided.

Nor, on the other hand, should we overlook the fact that even at this stage, Badoglio's attitude clearly reveals two distinct attempts aimed at covering his bases in case Mussolini were to persist with his plans regarding Ethiopia:

a) to transfer the coordination and actual direction of Ethiopian policy from the Ministry of the Colonies to the General Staff;

b) to prevent De Bono from being entrusted with the command of military operations.

The letter just cited is extremely important not only for understanding Badoglio's position, but also because it explains the vehemence with which Mussolini, in his directives of December 30, insisted—tactically, to deprive that is, to deprive Badoglio and those who shared his views of one of their major arguments—on the concept that the objective of the war had to be the destruction of the Ethiopian army and the total conquest of Ethiopia.

On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that, even after Mussolini's directives of December 30, Badoglio did not change his mind. On January 19, 1935, in response to those directives, he in fact reiterated that it was not possible to begin operations in October and that they would have to be postponed until at least the fall of 1936. And, quite tellingly, he sent a copy of the letter he had written on this subject to Mussolini as well as to General Asinari di Bernezzo, first aide-de-camp to Victor Emmanuel III, so that he might bring it to the sovereign's attention.

He subsequently forwarded to the Duce a study on the strategic directives to be implemented in Ethiopia—technically sound, but essentially aimed at highlighting and exaggerating the difficulties that would be encountered in putting them into practice, and at effectively requesting a doubling of the forces initially planned. And, as if that were not enough, he continued to put forward—with the obvious aim of stalling—the most absurd demands (given the international situation), such as initiating negotiations with England and Egypt "regarding overflight and landing rights and the organization of

supplies in Egypt and Sudan," and, again in August and September, to appeal to Mussolini, warning him that, given the British stance, the situation was "by far the most serious our country has ever faced in its eventful history of national formation and consolidation" and therefore urging him—if he did not wish to "expose the country to a disaster that would plunge us to a Balkan-level crisis"— to "find an honorable solution to the current distressing problem, one that avoids war with England"—in other words, simply put, not to initiate hostilities in Africa.

This was in his capacity as Chief of the General Staff; as for his political maneuvering, we have already discussed it in our treatment of the position of Victor Emmanuel III.

Technically skilled and capable, Badoglio was not a man of unwavering principles and was extremely ambitious. It is therefore natural to wonder how to explain the fact that—after having gone to such lengths to oppose the war in Ethiopia—he ended up accepting it and taking command shortly after it began, once De Bono had clearly demonstrated his limited ability to conduct it victoriously and, above all, swiftly.

Setting aside ambition (which must surely have played some role), there are at least two possible explanations, perhaps independent of one another, though more likely fundamentally intertwined.

The first and most obvious is that Badoglio underwent—like Victor Emmanuel and perhaps in parallel with him (the marshal expressed his approval at the start of operations on September 17)— — a process of gradual alignment with the fundamental political arguments on which Mussolini based his conviction that England would not intervene, and thus became convinced that—limited to Ethiopia—the war was technically manageable without serious risks: for while Mussolini was absolutely determined to undertake it and launch it in October, as soon as the rainy season ended, he was also prepared to make available all the troops and resources that Badoglio requested—and even more.

Initially, as noted, De Bono had planned to deploy, in addition to the indigenous troops and those already in Eritrea and Somalia, 20,000 Italian troops; subsequently, Badoglio increased the planned Italian force to 100,000 men, well-equipped with supplies and air support; as early as the beginning of March, in response to the concerns and difficulties raised by Badoglio himself, Mussolini had in fact declared himself ready to send, by September–October, ten divisions, 300 tanks, and 300 to 500 aircraft, and to establish a reserve of 100,000 men in Italy, in addition to the troops needed to secure the borders and ensure domestic security. And the fact that these were not mere promises is demonstrated by the fact that when operations began, Italy had approximately 800,000 men under arms and, in East Africa, two expeditionary corps totaling about 220,000 men (of whom over 135,000 were Italian nationals); and that, at the end of hostilities, in Africa and the Aegean there were over 400,000 Italians and 90,000 colonial troops, with 14,600 machine guns, 1,600 artillery pieces, 500 tanks and armored cars, and 19,000 vehicles, approximately 86% of which were in Ethiopia (where there were also 386 aircraft).

The second answer brings us back to the issue—which we have already touched upon—of the differing attitudes among the three branches of the armed forces, particularly between the Army—and Badoglio was certainly the spokesperson for the views of a large part of its leadership—and the Navy and Air Force.

In addition to Lessona's brief and somewhat cryptic mention, some evidence to this effect also emerges from the documentation already known. In particular, it suggests that the Navy and Air Force were far more aligned with and willing to conform to Mussolini's wishes than the Army was. The observations

that the General Staffs of these two branches put forward in 1935 regarding the plans then being prepared were exclusively technical and never aimed at creating difficulties or causing delays.

In January 1935, when Badoglio was stalling and arguing that operations could not begin before the fall of the following year in any case, both the Navy and the Air Force, on the other hand, stated that they would be ready by November 1935 at the latest (the Air Force). And while, in early September, even the Navy—faced with the threatening presence of the Home Fleet in the Mediterranean—did not fail to point out the difficulties and risks that might be encountered, not only did its concerns dissipate as soon as the true situation of the British ships became known, but there is no reason to believe that those concerns, any more than those of the Air Force, there was any political undercurrent.

That the Air Force was aligned comes as no surprise: a favorite creation of fascism, practically shaped by Balbo, it was certainly the most "fascistized" of the three branches. The situation is more complex when it comes to the Navy, which, among the three branches, was considered the most closely tied to the Crown, the least "fascistized," and the most traditionalist. And not without reason. However, in addition to these factors, we must also consider others that may help explain its alignment. In particular:

a) In previous years, the Navy had been the most neglected of the three branches, both in terms of prestige and "political clout" within the Armed Forces (the combination, in 1925, of the posts of Chief of the General Staff and Chief of the Army Staff had been an affront to the Navy, prompting the resignation of Grand Admiral Thaon di Revel as minister; nor had the separation of the two posts in 1927—intended to appease its protests and those of the Air Force—completely erased that memory) and in terms of regular budget allocations;

b) the Navy had long advocated for its own enhancement and significant expansion, which it had only recently begun to achieve, albeit to a lesser extent than it had desired.

A decisive factor was that at the helm of the Navy, in his dual role as undersecretary and chief of staff, was Admiral Cavagnari, who from the outset had shown himself to be a proponent of the Ethiopian campaign and had explicitly expressed to Mussolini his support for carrying it out at that moment, on a grand scale and thoroughly, up to the complete occupation of the entire country. Cavagnari had never made a secret of the fact that such an initiative would provoke considerable hostility and encounter significant difficulties; for this very reason, he, too, had argued for the need for an explicit agreement not only with France but also with England.

A lengthy and thoroughly reasoned memorandum he wrote to Mussolini on January 15, '351, is particularly significant, all the more so because in it the author covered a wide range of major political issues and outlined the reasons why action was necessary and the ways in which it should be taken. It therefore not only clearly illustrates Cavagnari's convictions and the profound difference between his position and that of Badoglio, but it also allows us to understand both the underlying political reasons for the Navy's alignment—which he consistently carried out—and why—given his convictions—Cavagnari, once he was certain that England, even if it had wanted to, could not have intervened militarily, must have had no hesitation in accepting Mussolini's point of view, even though the agreement with London that had initially seemed necessary to him had fallen through.

In light of these factors, we do not believe it can be ruled out that an explanation for Badoglio's behavior may also be found in the differing attitudes of the three branches of the armed forces toward Mussolini's policies. Had they been in agreement, the Chief of the General Staff (and those within the

military hierarchy who shared his concerns) would likely have had greater room for maneuver, and Badoglio might perhaps have been able to exert his influence even on Victor Emmanuel III; since, however, they held differing positions, it is clear that there was very little Badoglio could do—even if he had wanted to—especially given the shift that public opinion had undergone in the meantime, as we have seen, and given that by then even the doubts and fears within the Fascist leadership were showing signs of subsiding or, at least for the time being, receding.

Thus, it seems only natural that, being the shrewd politician that he was, Badoglio did not want to take personal risks and instead preferred to play his cards right so that, despite everything, he could be the man who would reap the laurels of Ethiopia on the battlefield.

So much for Badoglio's personal conduct. As for the consequences, it is easy to see how his actions must have contributed to delivering the final and decisive blow to the entire political situation at the regime's highest levels: with Badoglio's alignment, in fact, the king's last remaining scruples were bound to vanish, and with them the faint hopes of resistance held by those Fascist leaders (Giuriati, De Stefani, Federzoni, etc.) who did not share Mussolini's policy, but were too weak to do anything, and of those "career" diplomats who, faced with Britain's increasingly firm stance, were beginning to fear that Mussolini had miscalculated and that—however it turned out—the Ethiopian affair would irreparably upend all the premises upon which Italian foreign policy was founded.

Nor, finally, can we underestimate another consequence: that it cleared the way for Mussolini by removing the last obstacle that might still have made it difficult for him to carry out his decision to "press ahead," even though—contrary to his initial hopes—it was now evident that it would not be possible to proceed in agreement with Paris and, above all, with London. With all the psychological implications this had for him.

For the purpose of understanding Mussolini's personality and the decisive influence that the war in Ethiopia had on it—both immediately and subsequently—these implications are, in our view, highly significant. With specific reference to Mussolini's foreign policy and the successes it achieved over a long period, and in response both to those who have denied these successes and to those who have overly downplayed the personality and political skill of the "Duce," A. C. Jemolo, with his characteristic historical insight and balance, has written that in Mussolini, "a formidable intuition, of the sort typical of a gambler—knowing whether the opponent will call the bet, not playing a card if one thinks the other has a better one"—was combined for years with a realistic "sense of limits".

If, as we are convinced, this statement is correct—and indeed, it strikes us as particularly apt when applied to 1935–36, the war in Ethiopia—it is, above all, essential for understanding the underlying psychological state that dominated Mussolini during that period, sustained him even in the most difficult moments—when doubts and fears gripped even some of his closest collaborators—gave him the certainty that England, when push came to shove, would not truly oppose his Ethiopian policy, and provided him with the courage to play out a game to the very end that—if this certainty had proved wrong—had his power and Italy's future as a great power at stake. For while it was indeed his political intuition that gave him the certainty he would win the gamble, it was thanks to his sense of restraint that he managed—even in the most dramatic moments and when his irritation with the British reached its peak—never to sever the increasingly tenuous thread of connection with London and to ensure that, despite everything, his fundamental interest in not irreparably severing solidarity with France and England at the European level from being called into question. In terms of personal self-control and the application of those qualities of an utterly unscrupulous yet highly refined tactician that Gobetti had already so accurately identified in him, there is no doubt that the war in Ethiopia was Mussolini's

political masterpiece.

However, it would be insufficient to attribute his success solely to these abilities. The war in Ethiopia was Mussolini's political masterpiece and his greatest success because he believed in it deeply, as he probably did in no other political initiative of his. And he believed in it not merely as a means to an end—for the sake of his personal prestige or, if you will, the logic of his vision of international relations and Italian foreign policy—but intimately, as something that corresponded to the raison d'être of his historical figure; so that for him it took on the significance of a mission intended to ensure that the Nation (both present and future) would recognize in his vocation its own, its absolute duty, and thus bring about that identification between vox ducis and vox populi that fascism had until then been unable to truly achieve.

From this (let us set aside for the moment the question of how this psychological and moral state developed after the success achieved in Africa) stemmed the moral tension with which he experienced the events of '35–'36 and his ability to master them tactically as they unfolded, even when they seemed to contradict his predictions and lead toward outcomes different from those initially anticipated and desired, without allowing himself to be unsettled by this, much less abandoning his goals.

To Ludwig, who in 1932 had asked him whether, looking back, it seemed to him that what he had accomplished was in line with what he had planned, Mussolini had replied:

It is not the same path I foresaw, but it is still the same traveler. The path has changed, because that is how history works: the individual remains the same…

The substance of the politician—the man himself—is, in fact, a living substance… All such substance is so flexible that the consequences of an action cannot always be exactly as they were foreseen.

In our view, it is this conviction—as well as the soundness of his fundamental intuition, which, incidentally, would not have been sufficient on its own—that holds the key to understanding—beyond mere tactical skill, which is important but not decisive—the reasons for the success of Mussolini's policy in Ethiopia, or, if you prefer, its superiority over British policy, which was too incapable of breaking free from a series of overly rigid and mutually contradictory frameworks and too tied to certain predictions that—rightly or wrongly—people were unwilling or felt morally and politically unable to acknowledge as having been overtaken by the reality of events.

Having outlined the domestic context, let us now turn to the diplomatic context, through which the war in Ethiopia took shape and developed. Given the specific nature of our study and since the diplomatic events related to the Italian-Ethiopian conflict are generally well known, our discussion will not dwell in detail on these events but will limit itself to identifying only those moments and essential aspects necessary to reconstruct and understand Mussolini's modus operandi.

For the Duce—as has been noted—Italian expansion into Ethiopia became a tangible and concretely achievable reality only following the agreements with France on January 7, 1935. The free hand obtained from Laval did not involve England in the least. Rome was well aware of this, just as it was well aware that England would not be willing to support either the expansion or, much less, the occupation of Ethiopia.

A note by Suvich titled “Diplomatic Preparations Regarding Great Britain” (undated but from January 1935) is explicit on this point. However, it also shows that Palazzo Chigi believed it was possible to reach an agreement with London and did not rule out the possibility of ceding part of Ethiopian territory to the British, even though the optimal solution was considered to be an Italian protectorate—with exclusive occupation of Ethiopian territory and ample guarantees to the British regarding their economic rights.

Given the extreme importance of this note, we reproduce it in its entirety:

Great Britain is certainly not inclined to support our expansion—much less our occupation—in Ethiopia.

The establishment of an Italian Empire between the Cairo-Cape Town meridian in Africa and the route to the Indies cannot fail to be a cause for concern in British politics.

On the other hand, England, which feels its ties to its dominions and possessions in other parts of the world growing ever weaker, is clinging to Africa with ever-greater determination.

Then there is the entire Nile Basin, which encompasses some of the most important regions of Ethiopia, where British interests are direct and evident.

For these reasons, it is not to be expected that England will lose interest in Abyssinia, as France has done.

On the other hand, the issue of Italian expansion into Abyssinia has been on the table for some time, and Great Britain must have taken this into account in its calculations.

The arguments we have good reason to put forward—and which cannot fail to concern Great Britain—can be summarized as follows:

- Italy’s disadvantaged position in the postwar division of colonies;

- Italy’s need for an outlet for its demographic and economic expansion;

- the example of England, which conquered whatever was necessary for its imperial expansion;

- Precedents regarding Italian dominance in Ethiopia (the Treaty of Uccialli);

- the already accepted principle of a possible partition of Ethiopia (tripartite agreement);

- the existence of slavery in Ethiopia, the country’s disorganization, lack of control over its leaders, undefined borders, etc.;

- the presence within the Abyssinian Empire of other recently subjugated peoples who are still kept in check by military force.

These reasons could serve to overcome England’s opposition to Italian action in Abyssinia. However, there are two factors that make the situation difficult and delicate:

1) the fact that Ethiopia is a member of the League of Nations;

2) Great Britain’s possible claim to a share in the rule of Ethiopia.

With regard to point 1), one must take into account the fact that England could cause trouble for the League of Nations even without intervening directly, but by prompting other Powers to act—Powers that will undoubtedly adopt a pro-Ethiopia stance in Geneva.

Now, two courses of action present themselves:

- either to conduct our actions in such a way as to always remain—at least relatively—within the rules of Geneva;

- or to disregard Geneva entirely, determined to abandon it when the inevitable reaction occurs.

It must be borne in mind that even in the event of withdrawal from the League of Nations, other countries may still apply the measures provided for in the Covenant.

There would also be a third possibility, but it does not seem to have any prospects for success at the present time: that of securing Ethiopia's expulsion from the League of Nations by invoking the existence of slavery, the lack of state organization, etc.

To pursue the path of agreement with Geneva, we must avoid a declaration of war (the Kellogg Pact must also be kept in mind) and appear to have been attacked. So far, this may not present excessive difficulties. The most difficult phase will be avoiding Geneva's intervention through conciliation procedures, commissions of inquiry, and reports—an intervention that would deprive us of any freedom of action.

Japan found itself in such a situation, which is why, at a certain point, it had to withdraw from the League.

What could greatly facilitate our task in Geneva would be a clear and precise agreement with France and Great Britain.

In any case, for the time being, it seems we must follow the line of:

- reach an agreement with Great Britain as well as with France in order to have, as far as possible, a free hand;

- highlight all factors that might expose Abyssinia's shortcomings and wrongdoings;

- ensure that our actions do not appear to be aggressive or overbearing;

- continue in Geneva to keep the issue focused on direct negotiations, while avoiding arbitration as much as possible.

Let us now turn to the second point: that concerning Great Britain's direct interests in Ethiopia.

There is no doubt that the situation in this regard is complicated for us: we have a series of treaties with Great Britain—the most important being the tripartite treaty—which establish our respective spheres of influence and guarantee certain rights, including territorial rights, to Great Britain in the event of Abyssinia's disintegration.

The problem now arises: in the event of a conquest of Abyssinia through our own action and at our own expense, do the provisions of the treaties in favor of Great Britain remain valid? The answer should be in the affirmative. The British might object to our entering territory recognized as being of interest to them. With regard to that territory, it should be noted that, aside from the undisputed portion south of the 60th parallel and west of the 35th meridian, the region of the Nile and Lake Tana is in dispute.

Such opposition from Great Britain might be limited to a verbal protest, only to be discussed later in the face of a fait accompli, or it might even be put into action through the occupation of all or part of the territory reserved for it by the treaties (there is already talk of a certain military buildup in Sudan). For this reason, it will be advisable to negotiate this point with Great Britain. The negotiations could take one of two forms:

- either negotiate on the basis of our exclusive occupation of the entire Abyssinian territory, albeit in the form of a protectorate, while guaranteeing Britain its economic rights;

- or to agree on joint action with Great Britain, leaving to the latter a portion of Abyssinian territory within the narrowest possible limits.

A decision on the merits of either system will have to be made during the course of the negotiations based on the facts that emerge from them. The first solution is clearly in our interest. As for the second, it must be borne in mind that British participation could greatly facilitate our task and the achievement of our objectives across most of the Ethiopian territory.

Although Suvich's note is extremely comprehensive in explaining the arguments and tactics on which Italian diplomacy intended to base the negotiations with London, it remains silent on the fundamental issue underlying the entire operation: namely, why—given the circumstances—it was believed that it was possible not only to negotiate but also to reach an agreement with England.

To fill this gap, we must refer to Mussolini's conviction that England would be unable to oppose his plans and that, therefore, while one could not hope to obtain from her preventive concessions of the kind secured from France, one could nevertheless force her hand by capitalizing on the fact that the London government could not jeopardize Anglo-French-Italian friendship in Europe for the sake of Ethiopia: and this, on the one hand, by confronting it with the inevitability of having to yield to his demands; on the other hand, by leveraging the French government's good offices with London—for whom the agreement with Italy was even more important than it was for the British government; and, yet again, by making it clear to London that, once satisfied in Ethiopia, Italy would have no further claims, so that it would be easy to reach a general agreement concerning both Europe (reaffirming Anglo-French-Italian friendship and a common stance toward Germany) and the Mediterranean.

To do this, however, it was essential to demonstrate to the British (and the French) that nothing would prevent Italy from carrying out its plans in Ethiopia; therefore, it was necessary to prepare militarily for the moment when, once the favorable season arrived, operations could begin (possibly by creating some border incidents that would, at least formally, justify them); and all this while seeking to buy time on the diplomatic front—that is, avoiding as much as possible the need to lay all its cards clearly on the table with London regarding Italy's actual claims and leaving it to London to take the initiative in finding, if necessary, a way out or a compromise; all the more so since the ongoing dispute between Rome and Addis Ababa over the Ual-Ual incident offered every opportunity to negotiate the issue—if they so desired—and find a solution.

For, in fact, one thing must be made very clear: throughout the entire Ethiopian affair, Ethiopia was always and only a pawn in the great powers' political game, manipulated by them solely for that purpose, without any scruples and, above all, without any real concern for its interests, its aspirations, or its very fate.

In light of this course of action, it is easy to understand why the Italians allowed the French to inform the British of the substance of the January 7 agreements, why the first step in London was taken only on January 29—and in an unofficial manner and in rather vague terms regarding Italian objectives—

and why Rome did not decide to lay its cards on the table with the British until the end of April (hence, in early May, Grandi's first mention of a territorial union between Eritrea and Somalia), that is, when Italian military preparations were by then known to all and for more than two months there had been those—such as the U.S. ambassador in Rome—who spoke of Italy's grand ambitions in Ethiopia and of war in the fall; and, most importantly, only after—in contrast to the silence maintained at Stresa before the League of Nations on April 15—Simon had shown that he intended to distance himself from Italian policy.

These facts—and other minor ones which, for the sake of brevity, we will not dwell upon—clearly show that Mussolini—convinced as he was that England, faced with his firm and resolute stance, would be unable to oppose his expansionist aims—preferred not to tackle the problem himself and to leave the first move to the government in London, namely, for London to propose the terms for a settlement of the Ethiopian question (and thus possibly negotiate on more favorable terms, whereas, had he been the one to propose them, England would certainly have negotiated on less favorable terms), both with regard to their respective interests—as derived from the Tripartite Agreement of 1906—and with regard to the manner of implementing such a settlement.

They also show that, when Mussolini took action, he did so only to dispel any suspicion that he was bluffing, and to try to prevent an overly expedited arbitration process from causing a timing mismatch between diplomatic negotiations and military preparations.

Moreover, he hastened to explain to Ambassador Drummond that it was necessary for Italy to resolve the Ethiopian problem "by any means" in order to "have freedom of action in Europe," and to publicly reaffirm this European commitment before the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. A little over two months after Hitler's decision on March 16 to unilaterally denounce the portion of the Treaty of Versailles relating to German disarmament, and a little over a month after the Stresa Conference convened to reaffirm and seal the common Anglo-French-Italian policy in the face of German rearmament and to ensure peace in Europe, these public statements by Mussolini, while on the one hand were intended to reaffirm Italy's willingness to remain faithful to its friendship and agreements with Paris and London regarding Europe, on the other hand, they were also meant to emphasize that, in the new European situation brought about by Hitler's initiative, Rome considered it all the more necessary to resolve the Ethiopian question in its favor.

In the Senate on May 14, Mussolini presented these ideas firmly but also in a generally measured tone.

Eleven days later, in the Chamber of Deputies, his tone was harsher. Beginning with the situation in Germany—and in particular the issue of Austria, which he described as "the only problem" but one "of fundamental importance" that was jeopardizing Italian-German relations—he said:

However, now that we have reached this topic, it will not be out of place to devote a few words to those who would like to stone us at the Brenner Pass to prevent us from venturing into any other part of the vast globe.

In this regard, too, it must be stated once and for all and in the most explicit terms that the issue of Austrian independence is an Austrian and European issue, and, as a European issue, also particularly Italian, but not exclusively Italian.

In other words, Fascist Italy does not intend to limit its historic mission to a single political issue or to a single military sector—such as the defense of a border, even one as crucial as the Brenner Pass—since all borders, whether metropolitan or colonial, are equally sacred and must be guarded and defended against any threat, even a potential one.

I have reached the point that you, comrades—I am certain—have been awaiting. You must consider the set of issues I have outlined in light of what may happen in East Africa, and in relation to the stances that individual European states will take, offering us the opportunity to prove their complete—and not merely superficial or rhetorical—friendship. But, first and foremost, we must rely on ourselves.

Now the threat to our borders in East Africa is not potential but real, already underway, and growing daily to such an extent that it places the Italian-Ethiopian issue in the harshest and most radical terms… The clash at Ual-Ual is the warning bell for a situation that has been brewing for some time, a situation that compels Fascist Italy to fulfill its inescapable duties…

Only men acting in bad faith—whether covert or overt enemies of Fascist Italy—can feign astonishment and feign protests over the military measures we have taken and those we will take… Thus, no one should hope to turn Abyssinia into a new gun, one that would be perpetually aimed at us and that, in the event of European turmoil, would render our position in East Africa untenable: let everyone bear firmly in mind that when it comes to the security of our territories and the lives of our soldiers, we are ready to assume all responsibilities, even the most extreme ones.

To understand the difference in tone compared to the speech delivered eleven days earlier (which, however, was accompanied by a softening of the Italian position regarding the initiation of arbitration proceedings for the Ual-Ual incident—a move that demonstrates Mussolini’s willingness not to shut the door on dialogue with London over Ethiopia), one must consider the state of Italian-British relations at that time and, more generally, to England’s attitude toward Mussolini’s Ethiopian policy.

That this attitude was, throughout the entire Ethiopian affair, anything but consistent—but rather contradictory and, despite everything, uncertain, even when it apparently seemed most firm and uncompromising—is today virtually undisputed, to the point that some—such as Salvemini—have described it as essentially complicit with Mussolini’s policy.

Such a drastic judgment is, in our view, excessive and, as such, unacceptable. This does not, however, preclude the assertion that in 1935–36 London lacked a clear and coherent vision of its relations with Rome, and that if any judgment can be made regarding British policy toward Italy during this period, it is that Mussolini was correct when he became convinced that, when push came to shove, England would not truly be able to oppose his Ethiopian plans, even though—at least initially—he had been overly optimistic about the actual resistance the British government would offer.

This was because, in his hyper-realistic conception of international relations as a mere matter of power and interest, he had failed to consider that a democratic government could not—even if it wanted to—ignore the weight of its own public opinion and had to, in some way, provide an outlet and satisfaction for it if it did not want to be overwhelmed by it.

At the beginning of the second half of the 1930s, the issues dominating British politics were, in addition to those related to the economic situation, the problems plaguing the Empire, the Far East (Japanese expansionism), and Germany. In this context, Italy played a secondary role, both because it was viewed solely as a component of the German problem and because, after Corfu, Italian policy was considered essentially to be in the wake of British policy; and Mussolini, despite all his initiatives and outbursts, had never posed a real problem for London's grand strategy.

Against this backdrop, the Laval-Mussolini agreements had been greeted with enthusiasm as a very important contribution to the European balance of power.

Especially after the Saar plebiscite and the exhilarating consequences it had had in Germany, the main objective of British policy in Europe had become to bring Germany back into the League of Nations and to find a modus vivendi with it that was not based on the mere use of force pursued by the French—especially if this meant promoting and "Europeanizing" the USSR. Hence the British aspiration to position itself as the arbiter of the European situation and to pursue a policy that would simultaneously contain Germany (with the assistance of France and Italy) while maintaining an understanding with it, so as to keep the USSR out of Europe and avoid becoming overly entangled on the continent by France, which would have liked to make the Rhine England's eastern border.

A typical expression of this particularistic vision that drove British foreign policy—and of its tendency to pursue appeasement with Berlin—was the naval agreement with Germany concluded in June 1935, in open contrast to the Stresa Agreements. This agreement provoked the strongest reactions and fears in France and contributed significantly to Paris's determination not to displease Mussolini under any circumstances and, indeed, to hasten the conclusion, despite the Ethiopian affair, of the military agreements with Italy.

In this context, the British government had not only been taken largely
by surprise by Italy's claims in Ethiopia—and above all by Mussolini's determination to see them through—but, more importantly, had failed to devise a coherent and effective course of action in response.

Britain undoubtedly had interests in Ethiopia, and it cannot be ruled out that contacts were underway with the Negus to reach an exchange of territories (part of the Ogaden in exchange for a corridor giving Ethiopia access to the sea through Somaliland) that would have ensured a significant expansion of British Somaliland and, above all, put an end to the Italian tendency to effectively extend Somalia's borders northward (as in the Ual-Ual area).

As the “Maffey Report”—a study commissioned after Italy’s initial overtures in late January and prepared by an interministerial committee comprising experts from the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Dominions Office, and the military departments—revealed, Britain did not, however, have “vital interests” in Ethiopia that would necessarily compel it to oppose an Italian conquest. The report was explicit on this point:

There are no vital British interests in Ethiopia or its vicinity that would compel His Majesty’s Government to resist an Italian conquest of Ethiopia. Italian control of Ethiopia would be advantageous to us in some respects (for example, regarding the security of border areas) but not in others (for example, with regard to trade).

Generally speaking, as far as local British interests are concerned, it makes no difference whether Ethiopia remains independent or is absorbed by Italy.

From the standpoint of imperial defense, an independent Ethiopia would be preferable to an Italian-controlled Ethiopia, but the threat to British interests would depend solely on a war between us and Italy—a war that seems highly unlikely at present.

The only real British interests lay in Lake Tana and the Nile basin. To protect these interests, the report suggested, the British government—in the event that Ethiopia ceased to exist as an independent state—would have to secure territorial control of Lake Tana or obtain guarantees from Italy regarding its protection.

As important as it is, the “Maffey Report” is not, however, sufficient to assess Britain’s actual interest in Ethiopia. Without going into too much detail, it suffices to note that for the British, the Ethiopian question presented—in addition to the immediate political issue, which we will discuss later—two other implications: the military one and the imperial one in the broad sense.

Militarily speaking, England found itself in a very difficult situation in 1935, given that the disarmament policy pursued in previous years and the economic difficulties linked to the “Great Depression” had significantly weakened the strength and efficiency of its armed forces. In terms of both quantity and quality (with the possible exception of the air force and the navy’s assault vessels), the British were—and certainly felt—capable of confronting and defeating Italy, whose army, moreover, they held in low regard both morally and materially.

The problem, however, lay elsewhere. On the one hand, since the Mediterranean was their main route of communication with India and the Pacific, they feared that a conflict with Italy would, for some

time, make communications with the East difficult, if not impossible, and that this might encourage Japan to take advantage of their temporary difficulties to attempt some act of force.

On the other hand, they were concerned about the cost that a conflict with Italy—even a victorious one—might impose on their fleet and, consequently, the resulting weakening of their position both in the North Sea (relative to Germany) and in the Far East (relative to Japan).

From this perspective, Italy's friendship was, for the Admiralty (which, moreover, had no confidence in the collective security system of the League of Nations and believed that England should rely solely on its own strength), extremely important and, in practice, indispensable. This became all the more true as it gradually became clear that France had no intention of making specific commitments to cooperate with the British Navy in the Mediterranean in the event of complications with Italy.

From an imperial perspective, moreover, the Ethiopian question presented itself in even more complex terms. While there was concern that it might provide new fuel for the nationalist and anti-imperialist (and, in some cases, communist) tendencies that were spreading throughout the colonial world and, in particular, stirring up the Arabs—especially in Palestine and Egypt— there were also those who viewed a return to colonialism in a favorable light, as they believed that the disappearance or humiliation of the only major independent African state would deal a severe blow to these very tendencies and, by extension, provide breathing room for British colonialism as well. Furthermore, there were finally those who believed that Italian imperialism, once it had acquired Ethiopia, would increase its ambitions and its ruthlessness and would—especially if emboldened by the conviction that it had triumphed despite British hostility—turn its sights toward other regions far more important to England than Ethiopia: toward Egypt, Palestine, and, perhaps, even beyond the Red Sea, toward Yemen.

Nor, however exaggerated, were these fears unjustified. For a couple of years, Mussolini and the regime had in fact begun to show a far greater interest in the Near East and even in the Middle and Far East than Fascist foreign policy had demonstrated in its first decade, even if the actual contours of this interest remained vague and ambiguous and did not reveal how much of it was episodic, instrumental, or propagandistic, and how much, on the other hand, was genuine.

As for Mussolini personally, in England (as well as in France), the words he had addressed on December 22, 1933, he had addressed at the Campidoglio to the participants in the first Asian student conference (sponsored by the GUF) and reiterated less than a month later in an article written for the Universal Service news agency—and, in particular, his assertion that Italian Fascism saw its own reflection "in the ills of which Asia complains, in its resentments, in its reactions" and that:

Just as on other occasions, during times of mortal crisis, world civilization was saved by the collaboration between Rome and the East, so today, amid the crisis of an entire system of institutions and ideas that no longer have a soul and exist as if embalmed, we—Italians and Fascists of this era—hope to revive the shared, millennia-old tradition of our constructive collaboration.

And this is all the more true given that the Duce's words were accompanied by certain Fascist political

and propaganda initiatives (as well as economic penetration efforts, which, however, generally went unnoticed at the time) that were aimed at the Eastern Mediterranean and could not fail to arouse suspicion and concern among the British, who were already facing so many difficulties in this region with the Arabs and the Jews that they would regard any Italian interference there as a veritable calamity. Here, it suffices to recall both the overtures Mussolini made during these years to Weizmann and other Zionist leaders—offering them his assistance in the creation of a Jewish state in the southern part of Palestine—and the efforts to build ties with and support (even openly: for example, through the Arabic-language broadcasts of Radio Bari, which greatly alarmed the British) toward Arab national movements, carried out at various levels by the regime with results that were, on the whole, not insignificant.

These two lines of action may seem contradictory only at first glance: aside from the difficulties this policy might have caused the British (and during the war in Ethiopia, these were considerable as far as the Arabs were concerned, though they should not be overestimated, because London partly dramatized them deliberately and partly overreacted to them, ultimately giving credence to a Mediterranean strategy of Mussolini's that did not exist or, at most, was projected into a very distant future), it does, on closer inspection, have its own clear logic: to bring about the creation of a Jewish state small enough to be accepted by the Arabs, thereby eliminating—through the Arab-Jewish conflict—any justification for Britain's continued presence in that region and, thereby achieving the threefold result of winning over both Jewish and Arab sympathies, undermining the British Mandate, and securing (while also leveraging the issue of the Holy Places) a privileged position in the Near East.

However significant they may have been, these considerations and concerns only gained weight at a later stage, when Italian-British relations became strained. At first, the London government's stance was influenced more by more immediate political factors, linked to the situation in Europe and within Britain itself. Both the MacDonald-Simon government and the Baldwin-Hoare-Eden government that succeeded it in early June viewed and handled the Ethiopian question essentially from a single perspective: to reach a compromise solution with Mussolini, satisfying to some extent his claims and his need for prestige, in such a way as to:

a) to preserve Anglo-French-Italian friendship and cooperation in Europe and avoid the risk of an Italian-German rapprochement and, worse still, of Mussolini allowing ideological considerations to prevail over national interests;

b) so as not to jeopardize their own imperial interests in the Mediterranean but, at the same time, to preserve the Geneva system of collective security.

In reality, among the "national" ruling class represented by both the MacDonald and Baldwin governments, the Geneva system no longer had many staunch supporters. Opposing figures such as Eden and Vansittart (for whom Austrian independence remained the cornerstone of everything) were, in fact, increasingly outnumbered—among politicians as well as military and colonial officials—by those who had ceased to trust the League of Nations and believed that England should entrust its security to the traditional instruments of international politics and, above all, to its own armed forces.

And even among the "League of Nations supporters," almost all were convinced of the need to maintain good relations with Mussolini, both because Italian friendship was indispensable for containing Hitler and trying to persuade him to reach an agreement, and because only close Franco-Italian cooperation and alliance could prevent Britain from becoming overly committed on the continent alongside France and, at the same time, dissuade the French from becoming too closely tied

to the USSR.

Almost all of them, however, also realized that the prevailing sentiment among the public was essentially pacifist, opposed to a policy of rearmament and in favor of collective security and the League of Nations. And they also realized that, based on this prevailing sentiment—supported by a number of groups (including the League of Nations Union, which in October 1934 had organized a referendum on peace issues)— the Labour Party could, if the banner of collective security and opposition to the policy of rearmament were left solely in their hands, achieve a major electoral victory and even overturn the balance of power in Parliament.

Hence the conviction that it was not possible to abandon the policy of supporting the Geneva system and that, on the contrary, efforts should be made to revive it (for example, by trying to bring Germany back into it).

Among the Italians, Grandi was the one who immediately grasped this crux of British policy. In a long letter he sent to Mussolini from London on January 21, 1935, he wrote:

The idea that Germany's return to Geneva is an essential objective of British policy has an essentially domestic political background, and can be understood precisely in relation to the British government's directives, which the Labour opposition is using to criticize the Cabinet's foreign and military policies.

During 1934, the government was confronted with a rather unusual phenomenon. Although England's economic conditions have been improving steadily, unemployment has declined, the budget has been brought into surplus, civil servants' salaries have been at least partially restored, and there is generally a more confident upturn in business across the country, National Union candidates were nevertheless defeated almost everywhere in the general and local elections. This trend has recently intensified. Over the past four months, the Labour Party has regained five constituencies and lost none. The number of votes received by "National" candidates—even in constituencies where they retained their seats—has consistently been at least 60% lower than the votes received in 1931. In most of the constituencies they retained, the "National" candidates had narrower majorities than in 1931, and finally, in the municipal elections last November, they [the Labour Party] not only regained the positions they held in 1929–30 but significantly surpassed those positions.

In examining the causes of this shift in electoral preferences, the Government has concluded that the Labour victories are due to the pacifist propaganda actively promoted by Labour Party candidates. Whether this is true or not is a highly debatable matter. Nevertheless, the Government believes this to be the case and that it is on this front that it must counter the Labour Party's efforts.

This political strategy is based on two criticisms: one directed at the British armaments program and ever-increasing military spending, and the other based on what is deemed to be Britain's insufficient support for the League of Nations.

Now, since the government has no intention whatsoever of slowing the pace of armaments, especially with regard to air defense, and since the failure of the naval negotiations has raised the possibility of an arms race in the naval sphere as well, the British government has no choice but to intensify its efforts in support of European cooperation and the League of Nations in order to counter the Labour Party

The Cabinet therefore prepared in 1935 to highlight its efforts on the international stage, presenting them as essentially aimed at strengthening the League of Nations and, more generally, the policy of European cooperation.

Being able to go to the polls by countering the Labor Party's—admittedly rather vague—criticisms with concrete achievements, such as the USSR's entry into the League of Nations, Germany's return to Geneva, the resolution of the German armaments issue, and even a modest conclusion to the Disarmament Conference, would mean undermining the very foundations of the Labor Party's criticism of the National Cabinet's foreign policy…

I am convinced that the British government is so keen to reach a solution to the arms issue and secure Germany's return to the League of Nations that, in my view, it is willing—provided that both objectives can be achieved in the coming months—to bring forward the elections so that they are held immediately, so that, in light of these international developments, it can demonstrate to the country the National Government's achievements in the field of that pacifist policy on which the Labour Party is preparing to attack it…

Unless one fully grasps this crux of domestic politics and views its foreign policy through the lens of this increasingly clear shift in public opinion, it is impossible to truly understand the British government's stance on the Ethiopian question or to explain its ambiguity, its vacillations, its tendency to stall for time, in the hope of reaching a compromise with Mussolini and in an effort to navigate the general elections of November 14, 1935, unscathed.

As Taylor wrote:

The National Government had not the slightest desire to oppose Italy; it did not share at all the hostility that the Labour Party harbored toward Mussolini as a "fascist." He was its valuable ally on the Stresa front. The military leaders, who already had their hands full with the problems of Japan and Germany, insisted that Italy not be added to the list of potential enemies.

From this perspective, even the "corporatists," once they realized they could not dissuade him, would have liked to find a way to come to terms with Mussolini; the real problem for them, as for the rest of the "national" ruling class, was managing to do so without undermining the corporatist system and without suffering internal political repercussions. Eden's position can long be considered typical in this regard. Hence, what Hoare (referring to his own policy, though the formula can also be applied to that of his predecessor at the Foreign Office, Simon) described in his memoirs as the British "dual line" toward Italy: to seek a direct compromise with Mussolini that would resolve the Ethiopian question without jeopardizing Anglo-Italian friendship and, at the same time, to defend the principle of collective security and the role of the League of Nations.

This was a policy that would have been extremely difficult to pursue even under relatively normal

circumstances, in which the government could have acted without too many domestic or international concerns, but it was unworkable in the situation facing Britain and Europe during those months; with British public opinion increasingly opposed to the League of Nations being sidelined or yielding to Italy; with Germany ready to unscrupulously exploit every opportunity to its own advantage; with Mussolini—increasingly certain of the correctness of his fundamental conviction, precisely because of the ambiguous stance of the London government—who, on the one hand, was becoming ever more deeply and increasingly high-profile in his involvement in the Ethiopian issue, so that, even if he had wanted to, his prestige would have prevented him from not "pressing ahead"; and who, on the other hand, completely underestimated (despite Grandi's warnings) the influence that public opinion had on the British government and failed to realize that, by doing so, he was forcing it to take an even harder line than it would have preferred.

In light of this policy, it is also possible to understand why, faced with Ethiopia's request to bring the Ual-Ual incident and relations with Italy before the League of Nations in Geneva, London (with the support of Paris and the Secretary-General of the League of Nations himself, Avenol) immediately took steps to prevent the matter from being referred to the League of Nations (by advocating bilateral negotiations and arbitration based on the 1928 treaty and persuading the Addis Ababa government to accept this approach); and if, at a certain point, with Simon's speech, it apparently intervened in favor of Ethiopia, it was because, given Italian obstructionism, it had no choice; for if the arbitration proceedings had not been initiated, the Negus would have returned to the fray to refer the entire matter to the League of Nations; and that was precisely what they wanted to avoid, since, once the issue was officially brought before the League of Nations in Geneva, it would have been practically impossible for the British government to reach a compromise with Mussolini while simultaneously posing as a champion of the League of Nations.

In light of this policy, it is ultimately possible to explain the British stance at Stresa as well. Logically speaking, the Stresa conference (April 11–14) would have been the ideal forum for a thorough discussion of the Ethiopian question; both because it brought together around the same table the top leaders of British, French, and Italian politics—MacDonald, Simon, Vansittart, Flandin, Laval, Léger, Mussolini, Suvich, and Aloisi; and because, having been convened to address the common stance toward Germany following Hitler's initiative of March 16, this could have been done quietly and without causing alarm.

After all, everyone had secretly assumed the issue would come up, so much so that the British and Italian delegations had included their respective experts on the matter. In reality, at Stresa, the British waited for Mussolini to raise it, and the Italians waited for the British to do so.

And when the Duce, during the approval of the joint declaration, tried indirectly to provoke a stance from the British, they did not take him up on the invitation. There are various accounts of that decisive moment, all of which essentially agree.

The most comprehensive is probably Barros's account:

The concluding sentence of the declaration originally stated that “the three powers, whose policy is aimed at the collective maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations, are in complete agreement in opposing, by all possible means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties that might endanger peace, and will act in close and cordial cooperation toward this end.” When this was read aloud, Mussolini proposed that the declaration be amended to read: “that might endanger the peace of Europe.”

The Duce’s proposal was clear to everyone. There was silence. MacDonald looked at Simon, as did Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.

On the French side of the table, Mussolini’s request “brought a knowing smile to Mr. Laval’s lips.” The French Prime Minister, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, remained silent. No objection was raised, and the Duce’s proposal was accepted.

Six months later, in the House of Commons, Hoare explained the British silence by stating that at Stresa “there were high hopes for an amicable solution between Italy and Ethiopia, while the immediate and overriding objective was to ensure unity in Europe among France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Indeed, it was hoped that this outcome—which would not be easy to achieve—would be seen as a valuable incentive not to do anything that might jeopardize it.

Contemporaries and historians alike have almost unanimously criticized this explanation and, more generally, the British silence at Stresa: the silence of the British leaders—it has been said—was interpreted by Mussolini as tacit consent and encouraged him to press ahead with his policy; a clear stance at that moment, before the Duce had publicly committed himself too far, might instead have yielded a very different result and, in any case, would have provided political clarity. This argument strikes us as somewhat simplistic, even setting aside what we have said about Mussolini’s attitude and the consideration—which we believe must be made—that in October Hoare certainly could not have publicly disclosed all the reasons that had led MacDonald and Simon to remain silent.

While there is no doubt that at the time the Duce did indeed interpret the British silence as tacit consent, it is equally true that Simon, with the stance he took two days later in Geneva, immediately corrected this impression: the fact that Mussolini took offense at this clearly demonstrates that he understood that the British Foreign Secretary did indeed wish to prevent the League of Nations from being involved in the Ethiopian question, but was not, however, willing to give him free rein.

Nor, furthermore, do we believe that the British silence at Stresa should be judged solely in relation to Anglo-Italian relations. On the contrary, we believe its true reason lies in Anglo-French relations.

At Stresa, those most interested in reaffirming the tripartite alliance were certainly the French: would raising the Ethiopian question there not have meant running the risk of jeopardizing relations between London and Paris and of bringing Laval even closer to Mussolini, giving the latter the impression that

he had succeeded in isolating England? Faced with this risk, wasn't it better to remain silent and—rather than exacerbating tensions—try to bind the French as closely as possible to their own policy in the ongoing negotiations with Rome (especially knowing they were negotiating the naval agreement with Germany)?

Not to mention, finally, that any clash with Mussolini over Ethiopia could hardly have remained secret and, in any case, would have made it more difficult for the British government to drag things out and seek an extranational solution to the issue.

From this perspective, to assess the British stance and understand the reactions it provoked in Mussolini, we believe one should look not so much to the Stresa episode as to the talks held in London and Rome in early May—and especially those in the last ten days of that same month: in Rome between Mussolini and Drummond, and in Geneva between Aloisi, Eden, and Laval (and Avenol).

It is, in fact, this series of talks that explains the new tone adopted by Mussolini in his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on May 25. Four things emerged clearly from these talks: the irrevocability of Mussolini's decision to resolve the Ethiopian question (even though the Italians remained vague and essentially open-ended regarding the actual limits of this settlement, and it can be ruled out that Mussolini was considering a totalitarian solution); Laval's essentially pro-Italian stance, even though it was clear that the French did not want to lose their ties with London; the British decision not to endorse in any way—and, if necessary, to explicitly condemn—an Italian use of force; but, at the same time, the London government's willingness to avoid at all costs a break with Mussolini and to try to accommodate his demands with a solution to the dispute that would, if possible, bypass the League of Nations.

Hence Mussolini's irritation with the British (which gradually intensified due to the increasingly sharp criticism and attacks from the British press, as well as references to the internal difficulties his policies were encountering), but also the reaffirmation of his conviction that, at heart, he had been right, even if the difficulties to be overcome would be greater than expected—and with them, the risks he would have to face. This led to a whole series of very significant consequences that, over time, profoundly altered Mussolini's plan.

First and foremost, this led Mussolini to adopt an increasingly hardline and uncompromising stance—especially in public. Personally, in his speeches (both to demonstrate to the outside world that he was not bluffing and to raise awareness among the Italian public and prepare it for conflict and a showdown with England and the League of Nations), and, more generally, by launching an increasingly harsh press campaign against Ethiopia and, above all, against England, which opposed Italy's "sacrosanct" needs for "defense" and "expansion" and refused to recognize Italy as a new major European and Mediterranean power with which to negotiate on an equal footing for the defense of international peace and justice.

For at the diplomatic level, at least formally, his behavior was more flexible and—however difficult it may be to believe that he still considered the possibility of reaching an agreement with England before forcing its hand with military action in Ethiopia—such as to leave some room for the "careerist's" attempts to devise a diplomatic solution outside the Geneva framework—or even within it—that could resolve the Ethiopian question through diplomatic means, exploiting the contradictions in British policy, Laval's good offices, and Avenol's concerns about the consequences the Ethiopian affair might have for both the League of Nations and the European balance of power (with particular reference to Austria).

All the more so because, by doing so, Mussolini achieved a whole series of secondary but by no means negligible results: dragging out the diplomatic negotiations so as not to face a time lag with regard to military preparations, reassuring to some extent the "careerists"—who were deeply concerned about the direction things were taking—and demonstrating to the king and the regime's leadership that he was making every effort to avoid a rupture with London.

To gain an accurate picture of the situation, one must also take into due consideration the fact that this formal diplomatic flexibility on Mussolini's part began, precisely during this period, to be accompanied by a growing intensification of contacts and maneuvers (especially secret ones) with the Arab world (particularly in Egypt, Palestine, and Yemen), with the aim of creating difficulties for the British in those countries and instilling in them the fear that, in the event of serious complications or, at worst, a conflict with Italy, they would find themselves having to face a difficult situation right at the heart of their imperial system.

Another consequence was that it prompted Mussolini to seek some form of safeguard against Germany, adopting a more flexible and conciliatory stance toward it, so as to rekindle Hitler's hopes for an Italian-German rapprochement.

It is unlikely, however, that—unless he had his back against the wall—Mussolini truly believed he could embark on this path. In early May, speaking with Pittalis, the Italian consul in Munich, he expressed his conviction that all bridges with Germany had now been burned and that Italy stood "fully alongside the Western powers," and there is no evidence to suggest he was not sincere.

Even setting aside his vacillating strategy, it is nevertheless obvious that, should the crisis in relations with England have gone beyond the limit he had initially anticipated, he—while wishing to appear ready for anything (hence the massive deployment of forces and the exceptional emphasis placed on the large-scale military maneuvers held, not coincidentally, in late August in Trentino and South Tyrol)—also wanted to improve relations with Berlin. In fact, he must have believed that by doing so he could secure a twofold advantage: to indirectly pressure London and, above all, Paris, by hinting at the danger of his abandoning the "Stresa front," and to persuade Hitler not to create difficulties for him at that critical moment.

Nor can it be ruled out that—convinced as he was of the inevitability that Hitler would abolish all the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles that limited German sovereignty, and informed, as he was by Cerruti and Renzetti, that the next step along this path would be the remilitarization of the Rhineland—Mussolini might have thought that, from his particular point of view, it was ultimately more useful to indirectly encourage Berlin to act in this direction in conjunction with his actions in Ethiopia, since this would have completely tied the hands of the French and the British.

Hence, by mid-May, a whole series of cautious but inviting overtures toward Berlin (including the transfer of the unpopular Cerruti to Paris) and more conciliatory stances than in the past (among them, as already mentioned, the statement in the Chamber of Deputies in which Mussolini emphasized that the only outstanding issue between Italy and Germany was the Austrian question) which would culminate in the statement made by the Duce to Ambassador von Hassell on January 6, 1936, that the "Stresa Front" was now "dead forever" and that he would raise no objections if Austria, while remaining formally independent, were to follow in Germany's wake and pursue a foreign policy "parallel to that of Germany."

This statement has been interpreted as a genuine shift in Mussolini's attitude toward the Anschluss. As important as it may be, interpreting it in this way with reference to that particular moment seems to us, however, to be excessive: in light of Mussolini's overall position at that time—we repeat—it is our conviction that it was merely a tactical expedient, dictated by contingent circumstances (including the need to try to curb Hitler's ambiguous policy toward Ethiopia), and that, as such, it did not constitute an actual change of course with respect to Mussolini's policy of collaboration and general agreement with London; therefore, it should be judged on the basis of what—in the spring of 1935—Mussolini told Ernst Niekisch during a conversation that clearly demonstrates how deeply his concerns and hostility toward National Socialist policy were rooted.

We have only Niekisch's account of this conversation as recorded in his memoirs; however, Niekisch's political and ideological stance at the time of publication suggests that his account is accurate. According to this account, Mussolini also touched on the issue of the Austro-German Anschluss.

He agreed that Austria should align itself with Germany in terms of constitutional, economic, and cultural policy, but under no circumstances could he tolerate a constitutional Anschluss. It was unacceptable for Germany to push all the way to the Italian borders. Germany's influence was too great for Italy to accept immediate German pressure on its Brenner border.

He had made this clear to Berlin on several occasions; but Hitler did not understand the ABCs of politics based on the principle of "do ut des"; Hitler always wanted only to take without ever giving. While this was undoubtedly very convenient, he would soon no longer find a partner willing to commit to such one-sided arrangements.

Viewed from this perspective, it is difficult to regard Mussolini's statements to von Hassel as a change in attitude toward the possibility of the Anschluss or as an indication of the Duce's actual willingness—or even mere inclination—to switch sides.

Thirdly, and finally, another consequence of the Anglo-French-Italian talks in May was that they led Mussolini to reject all the offers the British made to him in the months immediately following, in an attempt to peacefully resolve the Ethiopian question: both because they were too limited and because, through them, London intended to close the matter and—having satisfied his claims and his need for prestige to some extent—restore the previous status quo.

That is, a situation in which British policy essentially took the lead over Italian policy, without taking into account Mussolini's overtures for a general agreement and, therefore, for a new relationship based on equality.

The first offer was decided upon immediately after the formation of the Baldwin government and the submission of the "Maffey Report" to it, during the second ten-day period of June.

Eden, the Minister for Relations with the League of Nations, was tasked with personally delivering it to Mussolini; he arrived in Rome for this purpose on the evening of June 23, after a brief stop in Paris, during which he had made no mention whatsoever to the French of the offer he was about to present.

Mussolini and Eden held two meetings, on the morning of the 24th and the afternoon of the 25th; the British minister also had several discussions with Suvich and Aloisi. In the months and years that followed, both in the press and propaganda and especially in public opinion, the most fantastical stories would flourish around these two meetings—stories that, particularly in Italy, were best suited to

satisfying national pride and glorifying the figure of the Duce.

And this helps explain why, for years, the regime's propaganda went so far as to portray Eden—who was, politically speaking, a rather lackluster figure, objectively unworthy of the responsibilities entrusted to him and the fame he long enjoyed—as the embodiment, the symbol of the treacherous Englishman, an anti-fascist and enemy of Italy. In reality, the two meetings were by no means dramatic in tone, and although they revealed a substantial divergence of views, they remained conducted in an extremely courteous manner; Mussolini did not lose his composure at all and did not even remotely consider humiliating or threatening his counterpart.

During the first meeting, Eden—after stating that the British government was "irrevocably committed" to the League of Nations and therefore could not "remain indifferent to events that might seriously jeopardize the League's future," and that there was no disagreement on this point among the British public—put forward his offer:

Great Britain, aware that Abyssinia attaches great importance to having access to the sea, is determined to cede to Abyssinia the small bay of Zeila and a portion of territory forming a corridor between Zeila and the Abyssinian hinterland, in order to induce Abyssinia to make significant concessions to Italy. Such concessions could include: the cession of the Ogaden province, economic concessions, and other benefits to be determined.

Mussolini's response was immediate and categorically negative. The proposed solution would have strengthened Ethiopia, turning it into a coastal nation and enabling it to procure weapons even more easily; it would not have allowed a connection between Eritrea and Somalia; it would have made England "the protector and benefactor" of Ethiopia, so that Ethiopia could claim victory and would come to hate Italy even more, whereas Italy—on the contrary—wanted to put an end once and for all to the recurring threats against its colonies. Italy, too, could have offered Ethiopia a harbor, but Ethiopia did not want to come to an agreement with Italy. "They detest us and do not trust us, and we do not trust them." And to leave no doubt as to the meaning of his words, he made a point of clarifying:

a) that he saw only two solutions: a peaceful solution would mean the transfer to our direct control of all the territories that are not of Ethiopian ethnicity and that were conquered for Abyssinia by Menelik and his successors, plus control over the central core. A solution involving war would mean, possibly, the eradication of Ethiopia from the map;

b) that he had weighed all the consequences of this second solution—those affecting relations with the League of Nations and those more directly concerning Italian-British relations—and that, nevertheless, he could only reject the offer made to him.

Despite this curt reply and despite the fact that Mussolini had struck him as animated by a sort of "gloomy fatalism," so that it was his impression that "it would take far more than the power of reason to sway him," as soon as the meeting ended, Eden (who, according to Aloisi, was himself "extremely gloomy" and almost "knocked down" by the encounter with Mussolini) hastened to request another

meeting through Suvich. The course of this second meeting, combined with the fact that in the interim Eden showed interest in Aloisi's proposals for coordinated Italian-French-British action to expel Ethiopia from the League of Nations, confirms Eden's assertion in his memoirs that, for the British, the rejection of their offer was not entirely unexpected and, above all, that they had no intention whatsoever of giving up on finding another basis for an agreement with Mussolini—one that would obviously be more favorable to him.

If we then consider the ambiguous behavior toward the French—when Eden, on his outbound trip, stopped in Paris without mentioning anything to them (and, incidentally, the cession of Zeila, which was of no consequence to the British, would have caused significant economic damage to Djibouti) and the proposal made to them on the return trip to replace the British government in the mediation effort (even though he knew that Laval favored establishing an Italian protectorate over Ethiopia), one is almost led to believe that at the heart of Eden's mission lay, rather than the hope that Mussolini would accept the proposal made to him, the desire to sound out the Duce's intentions and to form a precise idea of his territorial objectives; and this would also explain the care taken not to involve France in the effort—both, as at Stresa, to prevent France from explicitly distancing itself from London, and above all to be able, at a later stage, to try to get France to take other initiatives that the British government considered too unpopular and therefore preferred to shift onto Paris.

On the afternoon of June 25, Eden was, in fact, primarily concerned with establishing precisely what the Duce's demands and proposed solutions were, managing to get him to point out on a map the territories he wanted to occupy directly and those he intended to leave to the Negus (Tigray, Goggian, and Shoa), and to tell him that for these he wanted "a regime similar to that of Egypt or Morocco." Upon learning this, while on the one hand he said that "unfortunately, the Italian point of view is not shared by Great Britain," on the other hand he stated that "however, we still have time ahead of us, and it is to be hoped that some new development may arise that will make a peaceful solution possible."

Furthermore, having met with De Chambrun and Drummond before leaving Rome, he does not appear to have raised any objections to what the French ambassador (with the support of his British colleague) told him—namely, that "the Italians could not accept those proposals and that a further effort must be made."

The second offer was made in mid-August during a series of talks between Laval, Eden, and Aloisi, who had gathered in Paris in their capacity as representatives of the signatory powers of the 1906 Tripartite Agreement.

In the meantime, however, the situation had deteriorated considerably. In England, on the very day that Eden returned to London from Paris and Rome—June 27—the committee organizing the aforementioned referendum on peace issues (the famous "Peace Ballot") had announced the final results of its initiative.

Over 11.5 million people had participated in the referendum; of these, nearly 96% had voted in favor of England remaining in the League of Nations, and over 90% in favor of general and controlled disarmament; As for the question regarding how, if one nation wished to attack another, the other nations should act to compel it to desist from its intentions, 86.8% had declared themselves in favor of economic measures and 58.7% also in favor of military measures, if necessary. Such an apparently clear-cut shift in public opinion had made the government extremely cautious, fearful of taking initiatives that might work in the Labor Party's favor at the polls. This was especially true after the offer Eden had made to Mussolini was leaked, and the government had to acknowledge that the

impression it had created was by no means positive.

As Baer rightly noted, the Peace Ballot “did not make the government the standard-bearer of the League of Nations”; in fact, it certainly did not change the minds of “national” leaders nor did it alleviate the skepticism many of them harbored toward the Geneva-based organization; “but it now became more difficult for the government to justify its concessions to Mussolini domestically, while it became politically expedient to increase support for the League in some way.”

Consequently, in practical terms, this led to a marked intensification of its tendency to entrench itself (while continuing diplomatic efforts to the fullest extent) in a wait-and-see position and to try to persuade Laval to adopt a “more energetic and loyal” stance in support of British policy and the League of Nations, as well as to pressure Mussolini to dissuade him from resorting to force and to get him to accept a compromise solution. This was precisely what Laval (who had since become prime minister) wanted to avoid, as he was ready to heed all warnings and general calls for moderation but was by no means willing to do anything that might (especially after the Anglo-German naval agreement) jeopardize his relations with Rome.

So much so that by the end of July, Mussolini’s attitude toward England had become so intransigent and suspiciously hostile that it led him not only to write in *Il Popolo d’Italia* that Italy would resolve the Ethiopian issue “with Geneva, without Geneva, against Geneva,” but also to seriously consider the possibility of an armed conflict with England (to the point of instructing Badoglio to study the relevant military measures), this had been provoked—perhaps more by the pro-Society shift in British policy following the Peace Ballot than by the fact that Laval had shown Aloisi a British memorandum that seemed to corroborate the idea that London wanted to prevent an Italian military initiative at all costs; it justified viewing as insincere the British statements that, in principle, acknowledged Italy’s need to expand; and it even contained highly critical and even insulting judgments and assessments of Italian policy, Mussolini, and the Italian people themselves.

In this climate, the Paris talks in mid-August were bound to fail.

Mussolini had agreed to them partly to buy time, partly to clarify relations with England and France ahead of the Geneva session in September—which was decisive in many respects, given that the conclusions of the arbitration commission on the Ual-Ual incident were to be submitted there—and partly because Avenol, De Chambrun, Drummond, and Grandi had urged him in this direction, in the hope of reaching an agreement.

His position, however, was uncompromising. At this stage, war could be avoided only by granting Italy a mandate or protectorate over Ethiopia. This request had already been conveyed on July 10 by Grandi to Vansittart, and it formed the basis of the instructions given to Aloisi upon his departure for Paris—instructions of which the Italian representative had immediately informed Laval. Compared to this demand, the offer devised by the British—and accepted by the French and Avenol—was, in the Duce’s view, not only too limited but also so difficult, protracted, and uncertain to implement that it was clearly unacceptable. All the more so because, for Mussolini, it had one major flaw and one significant advantage. The flaw was—as the Duce telegraphed to Aloisi—that it had come too late: eight to ten months earlier, when the Italian military machine had not yet been set in motion or was still in its early stages, it might perhaps have served as a basis for negotiation; now, however, given how far domestic propaganda efforts had progressed, accepting it would end up looking like the classic “mouse born of a mountain,” damaging his prestige and creating serious difficulties for him, without sufficient compensation in return.

Aside from the two billion already spent, what would he have done with the million men under arms, and with the orders that had begun pouring into the industries?

It is certainly no coincidence that a month later, with the U.S. ambassador urging him not to reject the latest proposals the League of Nations was about to put before him, one of the central arguments he put forward to rule out the possibility of a compromise was precisely this.

“He doesn’t want a way out,” Breckinridge Long reportedly told Washington. “He intends to press ahead, in defiance of everyone and against anyone… he is flexible. He is irrevocably determined and serenely calm, and he is about to plunge into a storm that will either ruin him and lead his country to disaster, or actually elevate him to the pedestal upon which his fanatical followers sentimentally place him.

One of his first remarks when I had finished speaking was: “What am I to do with my army of a million men?” What to do with them? Demobilizing them would simply create a million unemployed. Halting war orders at the factories would leave others destitute and increase the number of unemployed, adding to the potential for local discontent and fomenting unrest. He now has no unemployed; everyone is employed, and the entire country is organized. He is driven by economic necessity. The hope of fame and wealth in Africa lights his path. The grandeur of the empire and the dream of glory keep him afloat.

His decision to force his way out of the cycle of economic poverty and his fear of having to face the social, economic, and political repercussions of a reversal of course have charted the course of his advance.”

As for its merit, however, it lay in confirming his conviction that England neither wanted nor could push the crisis to the point of a full-blown rupture; for no other reason, in fact, could one explain why it was willing to accept a compromise that—however he might judge it from his own perspective—certainly constituted a very serious blow to the prestige and very raison d’être of the League of Nations.

The diplomatic-societal Machiavellian maneuver proposed by Eden and Laval aimed, in fact, to resolve the issue by entrusting France, England, and Italy (to which the first two would grant a privileged position and a sort of mandate) with a kind of civilizing mission in Ethiopia on behalf of the League of Nations… Namely:

1. Ethiopia could appeal to the League of Nations for foreign cooperation and assistance in the economic development and administrative organization of the country.

2. This assistance should be collective.

3. Such assistance could best be provided through the cooperation of the powers bordering Ethiopia.

4. The work could be carried out in one of the following two ways:

a) The Council of the League of Nations would delegate the mission of assistance and reorganization; the Council’s decision would, of course, have to be taken in agreement with Ethiopia;

b) the conclusion of a treaty among the four Powers should be submitted to the Council for its approval; this treaty would replace the one of 1906.

5. In either case, the issues to be addressed under the new arrangement could include the following:

a) Concessions for the exploitation of economic resources;

b) Development of foreign trade;

c) Admission of foreigners for the purpose of settling them in suitable locations;

d) Construction of transportation routes and public works in general;

e) Modernization of administrative services, with special reference to the judiciary, prisons, public health, the postal service, and telegraphs, etc.;

f) Public education;

g) Measures against slavery;

6. The above-mentioned arrangements would respect the principle of Ethiopia's independence and sovereignty, as well as the open-door policy in the economic sphere;

7. This program would in no way preclude the possibility of territorial adjustments.

8. It was understood that the proposed arrangement should take into account Italy's recognized special economic interests in the economic exploitation and administrative reorganization of Ethiopia, without prejudice to the recognized special rights of France and Great Britain.

With the failure of the Paris talks of August 16–18, the Ethiopian question entered its most dramatic and decisive phase. No one could any longer harbor illusions that it would be possible to prevent Mussolini from carrying out his war plans within a few weeks, as soon as the season made it possible to begin military operations.

And, in fact, this was precisely the stance the Duce had taken on August 20 in a secret telegram to De Bono ("The tripartite conference in Paris has failed. Now there is Geneva, but the diplomatic situation has now run its course. You can draw your own conclusions." This was followed the next day by a letter stating: "I believe that after September 10, you must certainly await my signal." Procrastination was therefore no longer possible, and the League of Nations—and above all England (without which the Geneva-based organization was a shell without substance)—had to decide on a course of action, namely, what the response to Italian aggression should be.

It was at this point that the contradictions in British policy came to a head. The British government, while not ignoring the gravity of the situation and even though British public opinion was increasingly turning against fascism and Italy and seemed largely willing to accept a firm and decisive stance, was unable to put an end to its ambiguous policy.

He did not know why—as Baer wrote—among the "national" political class as well as certain influential members of the opposition, whether out of fear of war, or a desire to preserve British strength in the face of the German threat, or a deep-seated reluctance, among those with more pacifist leanings, to admit that the only way to protect the League of Nations from destruction was the just use

of force, no one wanted war with Italy, and everyone continued to accept the idea that the collective security mechanism could somehow be made to work its miracles without Britain's active leadership.

It could not happen because, even if it had wanted to take its opposition to Mussolini's policies to its extreme consequences, its initiative would have had to proceed in full, total agreement with the French, and that was not possible, given that to bring Paris into alignment with its positions, the British government would have had to completely revolutionize its entire political strategy—not only toward Italy, but also and above all toward Germany (abandoning appeasement and efforts to bring Berlin back into the League of Nations) and toward Europe.

Paris was well aware that it could not do without friendship and the entente with London; however, it also knew two other things just as well: that London did not want to take on further commitments on the continent and that, if necessary, British military aid could not be provided in a timely manner.

According to the Italian Foreign Ministry (which was likely relying on French statements), it would take as long as eight to ten months for this aid to become effective. Given these circumstances, for Paris, friendship and alliance with Italy (precisely during the final days of the Ethiopian crisis, Badoglio returned the visit that Gamelin had made to Rome in June) were so important (and secure) that Laval (and not only Laval) could have renounced them only on the condition of a solemn and explicit commitment by England against Germany—a commitment the British government was unwilling to grant. All the more so because French public opinion on the Ethiopian question was far more divided than that of the British, even though, in theory, anti-fascism was far more vibrant and active in France than across the Channel.

In the absence of such a commitment (which Laval requested in vain twice, unofficially on September 2 and officially on September 10), the French government had no intention of tying its hands and feet to England's, even though—as Laval had told Eden as early as August—"it believed that some form of condemnation of Italy's action would be inevitable."

In this situation, for London, any initiative—since it could not ignore the need to be taken in agreement with Paris—had to, by necessity, adapt to the French pace, and this pace was practically incompatible with initiatives involving an explicit break and a head-on confrontation with Rome. This became evident at the League of Nations in early September, when, "lacking a British guarantee of support on the continent, Laval attempted to dissuade the British from any idea of active resistance against Italy and decided to encourage Hoare's preference for a negotiated solution"; it was evident in the second half of the same month, when the British tried in vain to secure a commitment from the French to cooperate with their fleet in the Mediterranean; and, even more clearly, it was evident after the outbreak of hostilities in Ethiopia.

Hence the British government's "inevitable" choice: on the one hand, to declare itself firmly opposed to any unilateral action and any Italian aggression and ready to condemn it in no uncertain terms in the name of collective security and the League of Nations; on the other hand, just in case, to do everything possible for the time being to facilitate a last-ditch attempt at conciliation in Geneva (hence the Solomonic solution adopted by the Ual-Ual arbitration commission, which ruled out direct responsibility on the part of either Italy or Ethiopia in the incident, and the subsequent proposal by the Commission of Five on September 18 for a "charter of assistance" to Ethiopia—or, as the commission's chairman, De Madariaga, put it in private, an international mandate, which essentially drew on the Anglo-French offers of mid-August), but ready, should this fail, to declare support for collective action to enforce the Geneva Covenant (Hoare's speech in Geneva on September 11 made a

profound impression in this regard) and even for a unilateral show of force to intimidate Mussolini (by dispatching the Home Fleet to the Mediterranean in the second ten-day period of September).

On yet another front, however, it sought to give the concept of collective action—rather than a concrete political value—such a broad and all-encompassing definition as to render it practically ineffective, thereby inevitably reducing the resolution of the Ethiopian question (despite the state of war now in effect) to the stage of extra-societal diplomatic negotiations and the search for a compromise entirely to Italy's advantage.

And that these are not mere conjectures is demonstrated by two very specific facts. First: that in the secret talks of September 10–11, Hoare and Laval agreed that a war against Italy was a risk "too dangerous and double-edged for the future of Europe" and in foreseeing, therefore, only the possibility of imposing economic sanctions on Italy, ruling out military sanctions as well as a naval blockade and the closure of the Suez Canal—"in a word," as Laval would have put it, "anything that could lead to war." Second: that the substance of this agreement was even communicated to Mussolini in the last days of September, not only by Laval but also by the British.

To obtain as complete a picture as possible of the political backdrop upon which Anglo-French collaboration—and, therefore, the joint commitment of London and Paris—was based, one must not, finally, overlook the differing perspectives from which the two governments viewed the sanctions to be imposed on Italy as an aggressor nation.

As far as can be inferred from the available documentation, it is in fact evident that—beyond the facade, the emphasis on the principle of collective security, and the Geneva Convention—the British and French approached the upcoming negotiations to resolve the Ethiopian question with different perspectives, and that this led to differing interpretations of the substantive value of the sanctions, as well as of all other initiatives they undertook during this period.

A typical example in this regard is the deployment of the Home Fleet to the Mediterranean. This deployment has been the subject of much debate. On September 20, Drummond, in a meeting with Mussolini, and again in early November, Vansittart, in a meeting with Grandi, justified it by citing the violent attacks on England being launched by the Fascist press.

This justification is unacceptable; as Grandi replied to Vansittart, it was implausible that the articles by Gayda and his followers had forced the Admiralty to double the number of British units in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea; nor is it sufficient—as has also been done—to add to the attitude of the Fascist press the rumors of rising tensions among the Fascists and the "intentions" of some of the more fanatical elements to attack the British in the Mediterranean, in Malta and Egypt, and to explain the dispatch of the Home Fleet as a measure taken in a moment of panic by the Admiralty, without prior consultation with the Foreign Office. Setting aside all other considerations, this is sufficiently demonstrated by the fact that the deployment was part of a broader series of initiatives ranging from the concentration, three weeks earlier, of the Mediterranean Fleet in Alexandria and Aden to the reinforcement of the garrisons in Malta and Aden.

Above all, this explanation is contradicted by the fact that—as Mussolini immediately learned from the SIM—the Home Fleet was technically incapable of sustaining operations at sea in the event of war, both because it lacked effective anti-aircraft protection and—and this was the decisive factor—because its ammunition supply was sufficient for only half an hour of fire.

Is it conceivable that, under these conditions of military inefficiency, the Admiralty—if it had truly feared an Italian preemptive strike—would have sent its best ships to the Mediterranean, only to keep them idle there or, worse, expose them to the gravest risks?

Equally implausible (at least in and of itself) is the explanation that the decision to send the fleet was made primarily for domestic political and electoral reasons—that is, to appease British public opinion and avoid accusations of passivity from the opposition.

The real reason for the deployment must therefore have been another: to make a last-ditch attempt to persuade Mussolini to accept a compromise and to convince the world that Britain, while steadfast in its principle that every decision and every commitment must be made collectively by the League of Nations, was nevertheless willing—within that framework—to commit itself fully.

The unease, confusion, and fears that the Home Fleet's appearance in the Mediterranean aroused in certain circles of the regime and even at Palazzo Chigi, to the point that foreign embassies even picked up rumors that did not rule out Mussolini's resignation and pointed to Badoglio as one of his possible successors, suggest just how much the first part of the plan had a good chance of succeeding had Mussolini not been informed by the SIM of the actual military effectiveness of the ships that were arriving.

And this may help explain why the Duce said nothing to many of his closest collaborators about what he had learned from the secret service: by keeping them in the dark, in fact, he could better gauge their "fortitude" as Fascists and their trust in his "political genius" and, at the same time, later capitalize to the fullest on both this and his own "steadfastness of spirit."

And, continuing with this line of reasoning, it perhaps also explains why those few whom he must have informed of the Home Fleet's actual capabilities pushed for a rapid start to military operations in Africa, in order to prevent unease, confusion, and fears from growing and creating internal complications (and this was the case, on September 14, with the members of the Council of Ministers) —or, rather, to ensure they would not be intimidated by the British charade and, indeed, would be outraged by it and not oppose Mussolini's decision to launch operations (and this was the case, as we have seen, with the sovereign). The second part of the reasoning behind the decision to send the Home Fleet to the Mediterranean does not require further elaboration, given what we have already said about the British attitude following the failure of the tripartite talks in Paris in mid-August.

Its logic is, in fact, evident. Rather, a few words are warranted regarding what might be defined as the more specifically Italian aspect of this second part of the British calculation; for, in fact, while the presence in the Mediterranean of a large part of the British fleet served to reinforce, in the eyes of the world, a certain perception of British commitment to supporting the League of Nations, it was also intended to exert a second form of pressure on Italy—perhaps less obvious than the first, but certainly more important to London— If, despite everything, Mussolini had "pressed ahead," the presence of the Home Fleet was intended (in addition to serving as a deterrent to Arab nationalists should they have thought they could take advantage of the situation to challenge British rule) to remind him that the Mediterranean was and remained Britain's largest and most important imperial line of communication and that, even if Britain, willingly or unwillingly, might turn a blind eye to his Ethiopian ambitions, it would never, however, allow him to alter the Mediterranean status quo.

This British concern brings us back to the issue from which we began this digression on the significance of the Home Fleet's deployment to the Mediterranean—namely, the fundamental

difference in how London and Paris viewed the sanctions.

The British government, as has been noted, had ruled out the possibility of using force to prevent Mussolini from going to war against Ethiopia and was willing to find a compromise that would satisfy the Duce to some extent. This decision, however, was, so to speak, contingent upon two other very specific decisions—one directly concerning the Ethiopian question, the other concerning Anglo-Italian relations as a whole—which can be summarized as follows. In Ethiopia: to limit as much as possible the concessions that would have to be made to Mussolini. In general: under no circumstances allow the Duce to take advantage of the war to alter the status quo in the Mediterranean and in the regions bordering the Red Sea (that is, in practice, in Yemen) and, more broadly, to reshape Anglo-Italian relations on new terms—that is, to the detriment of British interests and the primacy of British policy over Italian policy.

Italy's special position in Europe might have led Britain to make concessions to Mussolini, but it could under no circumstances result in a crisis of prestige for Britain or a weakening of its imperial positions. From this perspective, the sanctions—even if only economic—served a very specific purpose for London: they were intended to place the Italian economy in such difficulty as to affect its very ability to sustain a prolonged military effort in Africa (since even the British—like, in fact, many others, including influential French and German military experts—were convinced that it would take the Italians at least two years, if not more, to subdue Ethiopia) and, therefore, to force Mussolini to accept a compromise resolution to the conflict and to realize that it was impossible for him to ignore Britain's will or to force its hand.

For the British government, therefore, economic sanctions were a weapon against Italy. For the French government—and for Laval in particular—the perspective was, however, entirely different, almost the opposite. First of all—as paradoxical as it may seem—for Laval, the sanctions were not a weapon against Italy, but—given the objective circumstances—a form of "assistance" to it: as he tried in every way to make clear to Rome at that time—wishing to maintain "Italian friendship in its entirety" but having to "accommodate the necessities of corporate policy" — for him, "throwing his weight behind economic sanctions" meant "being able to decisively oppose military ones" and preventing (as he told Ambassador Cerruti on October 15) a French veto from prompting England to withdraw from the League of Nations.

Second, his efforts were aimed at delaying the actual implementation of the sanctions and thus curbing the tendency to extend them to oil and other raw materials that had initially been excluded.

Third, and finally, Laval had no intention whatsoever of forcing Mussolini to accept a compromise that would diminish the scale of the conflict. As acknowledged by Italian documents from that time, he believed it was essential for Italy to achieve a major victory, after which it would be possible to force the Negus to accept Italy's terms.

In the meantime, he intended to put the corporate proceedings on hold to give Italy the time needed to achieve a decisive military victory.

In light of this Anglo-French stance, Mussolini's position becomes clear, both in the weeks immediately preceding the start of operations in Ethiopia and in the weeks that followed; certainly up until the failure of the Laval-Hoare plan, but, on closer inspection, essentially even afterward; even though, undoubtedly, Hoare's resignation (December 18, 1935) and his replacement at the Foreign Office by Eden, along with the fall of the Laval government (January 22, 1936) did, to a certain extent,

alter the general political context and forced Mussolini to partially modify his policy; and even though, in early March 1936, Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland introduced further new variables, affecting both the Anglo-French stance and Mussolini's own.

Broadly speaking, Mussolini's stance can be summarized along three lines of action, two of which were directed at England and the third at France.

The first line of action toward England sought to reassure the British government and public opinion by drawing a clear distinction between European issues and the Ethiopian question: Italy could not renounce its security and expansion in East Africa; however, this by no means implied that Mussolini did not intend to fully honor his European commitments or maintain the traditional friendship between the two countries unchanged; on the contrary, he wished to strengthen it, making it—along with the friendship with France—the foundation of continental security and balance and, in the long term, the basis for achieving a broader collaboration that would also ensure security and balance in the Mediterranean; those who opposed Italy's demands did so, therefore, either out of narrow-minded imperialism or anti-fascist partisanship, without realizing that they were jeopardizing European peace. It was along these lines that the communiqué regarding the Council of Ministers meeting of August 28 (held exceptionally in Bolzano to coincide with the large-scale military maneuvers in Trentino and South Tyrol) was drafted. It states, in fact:

After outlining the stance of certain British factions, the head of the government declared that Great Britain has nothing to fear from what would be Italy's policy toward Ethiopia should Great Britain be attacked by Italy. Italy's policy does not threaten, either directly or indirectly, British imperial interests; therefore, the tendentious alarm raised in certain circles is simply absurd.

Italy has an issue with Ethiopia; it has no issues—nor does it wish to have any—with Great Britain, with which, during the World War, following the Locarno Conference, and more recently at Stresa, a collaboration of undoubted importance for European stability was established.

The Fascist government believes that its colonial issue must not affect the European situation, unless one wishes to run the risk of triggering a new world war, in order to prevent a great power such as Italy from bringing order to a vast country where the most atrocious slavery and primitive conditions of existence prevail.

As for the issue of "sanctions," which would eventually have to be approved by the League, the Council of Ministers declares to the Italian people and to other nations that speaking of "sanctions" means setting foot on a slippery slope that could lead to the gravest complications.

These same concepts were repeatedly reiterated by *Il Popolo d'Italia*, including in articles written by Mussolini himself (albeit anonymously), and their essence was echoed in the communiqué regarding the Council of Ministers' meeting of September 28—the last one before hostilities began:

The Council of Ministers declares once again, as it did in Bolzano, that Italy's policy has no immediate or long-term aims that could harm the interests of Great Britain… The British people must know, above and beyond all anti-fascist misrepresentations, that the Italian government has informed the British government that it is ready to negotiate further agreements that will provide reassurance regarding England's legitimate interests in East Africa. The Fascist government solemnly declares that it will avoid anything that might expand the Italian-Ethiopian conflict to a broader arena.

In addition to the British, these public statements were also directed at the Italian people and served the regime's purpose of completing the picture of the international situation and Italian-British relations that it wished to portray domestically, in order to make Italy appear as much as possible to be a victim of the selfish arrogance of the wealthy nations. In this sense, they cannot be viewed in isolation from the increasingly violent anti-British campaign that the regime's propaganda apparatus carried out during this same period—a campaign to which the Duce himself contributed personally through several anonymous articles in *Popolo d'Italia*, which in more than one instance actually set the campaign in motion.

These articles were certainly an integral part of that campaign, in that they constituted its Italian aspect—positive and responsible—in contrast to the English aspect—negative and irresponsible—which was portrayed essentially on the basis of certain arguments that in turn served as the starting point for all other variations on the theme: England did not want Italian colonial expansion; it had its own designs on Ethiopia and was behind the Negus's aggressive stance; England manipulated the League of Nations at will and used it as a smokescreen to conceal a policy aimed exclusively at defending its imperial interests; British imperialism acted in close collaboration with international Masonic anti-fascism, which sought to humiliate and defeat fascism and, to this end, made use of all its allies (including Bolshevism) and all means, including those—such as sanctions—that had never been used in other, more serious circumstances (the Japanese invasion of China in 1931), or that had pitted two equally civilized nations against each other (the Chaco War in 1932), but which had not involved a fascist country.

Despite their effectiveness in achieving the kind of psychological mobilization the regime sought to instill in the country, it would be wrong to assume that these "conciliatory" and "reassuring" stances were merely instrumental and propagandistic.

In reality, they were merely some of the manifestations of what we have defined as the first line of action toward England implemented by Mussolini and Italian diplomacy at various at all levels and which was effectively aimed at defusing the conflict with London and allowing for a resumption of negotiations to reach a settlement of the conflict with Ethiopia as soon as possible—that is, as soon as, as Mussolini had made clear to U.S. chargé d'affaires Kirk since August 19, Italian troops had achieved

their first tangible success against the Ethiopian forces.

Much to Aloisi's astonishment, on October 1, Mussolini stated that if they were given "the large vassal regions of Abyssinia, the matter might perhaps be settled." Unless one assumes a moment of extreme remorse and fear regarding the consequences of the war he was about to unleash in two days' time, it is difficult to believe that the Duce thought—as has been suggested—that he could peacefully obtain what he desired.

Given how far things had gone, it was in fact unthinkable that England could concede more than what Eden had offered in Rome, Paris, and Geneva, unless its hand were explicitly forced.

Although determined to go to war, Mussolini was well aware of the risks and sacrifices it entailed, both politically and economically.

Given England's stance, the war could isolate Italy and, by reigniting old mistrust and hostility toward fascism that had never been fully quelled, could significantly damage Italy's political prestige and erase the peaceful and responsible image that his regime had come to project. Above all, it could have turned the crisis in relations with England—which the diplomatic preparations for war had already brought about—into a chronic one, making it increasingly difficult to safeguard Italy's special position and, in particular, to secure that general agreement with London which, as the Ethiopian question grew more complicated and slipped from his grasp, became for him an increasingly important long-term objective, since without it, the successes he would achieve in Africa would prove to be highly precarious, and Italy's international position would, in essence, be weakened rather than strengthened.

As for the economic aspect (we will discuss the cost of the war in Ethiopia and its repercussions on the Italian economy in the next volume), while the war might have offered the regime the opportunity to gain certain advantages (particularly through a reduction in unemployment—especially industrial unemployment—and, secondarily, in terms of a certain rationalization of the national economic system, both objectively and with respect to the type of economy and state intervention it sought to establish), the disadvantages would have been far greater, especially in the short term.

For an economy like Italy's, which had only recently begun to emerge from the "Great Depression," the burden of a large-scale modern war—which it was essential to wage both to ensure success and to hasten it as much as possible—was in itself extremely heavy and would have become almost catastrophic should economic sanctions be strictly enforced and prolonged over a long period. And if those sanctions had been total—that is, if they had affected all raw materials—it is clear that they would have, in Mussolini's words, amounted to the "death penalty by asphyxiation" for the Italian economy and made it impossible to continue the war.

In this situation, for Mussolini, the war had to be, first and foremost, brief and militarily decisive. Hence his decision not only to commit a large and very strong army to it and to spare no resources made available to him (consider, to give just one example, that the amount of gasoline consumed daily in Ethiopia was one-sixth greater than that used daily during World War I), but also to authorize the use of all means and expedients deemed suitable for making operations faster and more overwhelming—from the bribery and co-opting of certain Ethiopian leaders, to the use of asphyxiating gases against enemy troops, to the indiscriminate bombing of the rear areas.

Second, for Mussolini, the war—regardless of what he had written in his directives of December 30, 1934, and said six months later to Eden—was not intended to wipe Ethiopia off the map—a scenario

that would have meant humiliating England and making a resumption of friendly relations with it extremely difficult—but to force the Negus, that is, England and, with it, the League of Nations, to come to terms and accept his demands—namely, direct possession of all or a large part of Ethiopia's "peripheral" regions and control over the central Amharic heartland.

Hence his recommendations and instructions to De Bono dated October 20, 1935, which fully reflect his plans:

This telegram is a bit long, but it is crucial, and you will examine its contents together with Badoglio and Lessona. As you know, the League of Nations has decided to recommend that governments adopt various sanctions against Italy. Some governments will adopt the League's recommendations 100 percent; others will adopt them 50 percent; still others will do nothing at all—not to mention the states outside the League, such as Brazil, Germany, Japan, and the United States. I do not believe that economic sanctions will have any influence on our military operations or on the resistance of the Italian people, who are formidably united and resolute.

There is a danger, however, namely that, given the ineffectiveness of economic sanctions, we might move on to military sanctions. The British and the French have formally ruled this out—that is, they have declared that they have never considered a blockade or the closure of the Suez Canal—but I have little trust in either side. In any case, one can assume that a certain amount of time will pass before we move from economic to military sanctions.

While Italy was under siege in Geneva, I conveyed to Laval a few minimal demands on Italy's part regarding Abyssinia, namely:

1. The outright annexation of the conquered territories to our colonies;

2. A mandate for Italy—or something equivalent—over the non-Amharic territories of Abyssinia;

3. Territorial adjustments in Dankalia and the Ogaden;

4. Italy's participation in the League of Nations mandate over the Amhara;

5. Controlled disarmament of Abyssinia.

These demands will be rejected in Abyssinia. We must accept that we will certainly retain only what we have occupied. Our military action must be adapted in both manner and timing to these de facto conditions. There will be no complications in Europe before the British elections, scheduled for mid-November. Well then, by that date, all of Tigray up to Macallé or beyond must be ours. In your letter of October 6, you asked me for a month's time, and a month's time is at your disposal. While awaiting my order, which should reach you between November 1 and 5, press ahead with the occupation of the territory—an occupation that spreads like wildfire—so that the final push is not excessively long.

I also have a duty to remind you that with the end of the embargo, modern weapons and ammunition are arriving in large quantities in Ethiopia, so time is working against us.

On the other hand, an overly delayed occupation of Macallé could embolden our enemies and cause concern among our allies. After discussing this with Badoglio and Lessona, please reply.

Hence, once again, his decision to accompany military efforts and diplomatic action with certain initiatives that are as unscrupulous and even daring as they are destined—as events have shown—to certain failure; for if, on the one hand, they are yet another confirmation of what we have said regarding his tendency to use all means (even those least orthodox diplomatically and politically) deemed capable of paving the way for him to achieve his objectives; on the other hand, they further confirm, however, how much a swift and agreed-upon conclusion to the conflict was close to Mussolini's heart.

Typical in this regard are the agreements that the SIM made in the first half of December 1935 with a Palestinian-Mexican adventurer, Jacir Bey, who was said to be a friend of Haile Selassie. According to these agreements, in exchange for a payment of one hundred million lire, Jacir Bey undertook either to convince the Negus to conclude peace with Italy on certain terms by February 15, 1936, or, if that proved impossible, to orchestrate a "forced landing" in territory occupied by Italian forces of the personal aircraft the Ethiopian sovereign used to travel from one part of his empire to another…

Thirdly, and finally, for Mussolini, the war in Ethiopia was under no circumstances to lead to a total breakdown in relations with London. From this perspective, the Duce's modus operandi was not substantially different from the one he had adopted toward France in previous years and could be summed up in the formula: crisis, yes; rupture, no.

Hence the public assurances we have mentioned, as well as the even more numerous assurances conveyed directly and indirectly (primarily through France, but also through other channels, including that of the Holy See) to the British government that he intended to keep the Ethiopian issue clearly

separate from the European one, that he had absolutely no intention of withdrawing from the League of Nations, that he intended to fully respect British interests in Ethiopia, and that he did not aspire to objectives broader than those set forth to Eden—and, indeed, that he was willing to settle for even less. And above all, that the last thing on his mind was wanting a war with England.

Typical in this regard is the stance taken toward sanctions. Ever since the topic had first been raised, the regime's press had begun writing: "Sanctions mean war. Let it therefore be established, unequivocally and in a timely manner, that those British newspapers which present themselves as fiery apostles of sanctions are working toward war… A decisive, ruthless war of destruction on land, at sea, and in the air—such as might be waged by a virile and exasperated people, who are conscious of their rightful cause in the face of history, and who defend their right to life and work and their honor, which matters no less than their daily bread."

However, once it became clear that sanctions would be imposed, the tone immediately changed. The sanctions in question were, at least for the time being, economic ones: the threat that they might lead to war was then shifted from economic to military sanctions, and when, with the start of operations in Africa, the problem became a reality, that threat was further qualified and softened. And not only through diplomatic channels, but publicly by Mussolini himself in the speech in which, on the afternoon of October 2, from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, he announced the start of hostilities:

Instead of recognizing our rights, the League of Nations speaks of sanctions… We will counter economic sanctions with our discipline, our frugality, and our spirit of sacrifice.

We will respond to military sanctions with military measures. We will respond to acts of war with acts of war.

Let no one think they can break us without first fighting hard.

Although seemingly harsh and threatening, this statement actually proves that, for the Duce, economic sanctions were by then not only a foregone conclusion but would ultimately benefit his policy.

As Guariglia rightly argued, "Economic sanctions, while causing us some damage, would in fact function as safety valves. The pressure—filled with fears, hatred, and political miscalculations—that had been dangerously building up over the past few months would be released through such a valve, averting the danger of the boiler exploding. England itself would thus have had the opportunity to 'save face at the opportune moment, and in the meantime, our military operations would have provided us with solid leverage for future political and diplomatic negotiations.'

And that bringing the Ethiopian affair to a close as soon as possible, normalizing relations with

England, and initiating discussions with it toward a general agreement was precisely what mattered most to Mussolini is demonstrated by the insistence—as will be seen later—that he displayed in October and November, in parallel with the unfolding of the first offensive operations in Ethiopia, in urging London by every means to abandon the position of rigid and "loyal" adherence to the League of Nations policy on which it had entrenched itself and to move toward that of "realistic" bilateral negotiations. And, more generally, this is demonstrated by the role played—in relation to this "reassuring" and "de-escalatory" line of action toward England—not only by his policy toward France during this same period, but—on closer inspection—also by what we have defined as the second line of action toward London.

At first glance, what we have identified as the second course of action toward England may appear to be a mere internal contradiction within the first; at best, it may seem to be the result either of a sudden surge of anti-British sentiment—driven by disappointment or resentment over the intransigent stance taken by the British and the deployment of the Home Fleet to the Mediterranean—or of a moment of panic.

How else can one explain that, while seeking to pursue a "reassuring" and "détente-oriented" policy toward England, Mussolini intensified his propaganda and maneuvering in the Arab world in September 1935 and even reinforced the troops stationed in Libya by sending two additional divisions there? In other words, he carried out a series of acts clearly hostile toward England, which saw them as a threat to Egypt and to the heart of its imperial system and was deeply concerned about them (as evidenced by British documentation that remains largely unpublished) in ways and to an extent that were excessive and, in a certain sense, hysterical, but not for that reason unjustified, given that there is no doubt that the worsening of the Palestinian and Egyptian situations the following year was certainly facilitated by the difficulties created for England by the war in Ethiopia and, to some extent, also by Italian machinations and funding.

In reality, this series of actions (which we will not dwell on for obvious reasons of space) was, in our view, neither at odds with the "reassuring" and "détente-oriented" line nor the result of an anti-British outburst or a moment of panic. On the contrary, it was coldly conceived and implemented as a second "deterrent" line of action to support the first "reassuring" and "détente-oriented" one. In practice, with that series of actions, Mussolini did nothing more than repeat here what he had done with France in previous years: he sought to induce England to reach an agreement (for the time being regarding Ethiopia, but also keeping an eye on the long-awaited general agreement) by creating as many difficulties as possible for her where she was most vulnerable and where she was already facing a difficult situation.

So much so that—once this second "deterrent" course of action was set in motion—Mussolini hastened to justify it (as regards the deployment of the two divisions to Libya) by citing the arrival of the Home Fleet in the Mediterranean and the reinforcement of British garrisons in Egypt; above all, he hastened to reaffirm his commitment not to harm British interests in the Mediterranean in any way and to propose a parallel withdrawal of the Home Fleet and the two divisions as a first step toward détente and a subsequent agreement.

And he continued to express himself in the same terms even after hostilities began in Ethiopia.

To complete the picture of Mussolini's stance vis-à-vis the British and French positions at the outset of operations in Africa, we must now turn to what we have termed his "French policy." A few words will suffice. Toward France, Mussolini's policy during this period was, in fact, clear and straightforward,

free of Machiavellian maneuvering and, essentially, devoid of any reservations whatsoever.

Personally, the Duce held Laval in high esteem and had a favorable regard for him, and he was convinced of the good faith underlying Laval's policy toward Italy.

Apart from various highly reliable accounts, this is demonstrated by the two letters of protest—regarding Laval's interpretation in Parliament of the désistement of January 7—that the Duce wrote to him on December 25, 1935, and February 19, 1936, Mussolini was, in fact, too skilled a politician and too much of a realist not to realize that Laval could do nothing other than what he was doing and that it would have been absurd to expect more from him at that moment.

He also realized, however, that—to use an expression taken from an official document from Palazzo Chigi, which, incidentally, is entirely an acknowledgment and praise of Laval's good faith—the French Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs was forced by the international situation and the French parliamentary situation "to walk a tightrope," walking a tightrope between England and Italy, between French nationalists and anti-fascists.

Hence, for Mussolini, the necessity—the expression this time comes from Guariglia—to constantly work on Laval, so as to prevent his unlikely but not impossible alignment with British positions and to use him both as a moderating force against British and corporate initiatives and as a mediator to reach a compromise with London, both regarding Ethiopia and the subsequent general agreement.

Consistent with this vision, Italian policy toward France was marked by the utmost loyalty. While Mussolini was unwilling to heed Laval's exhortations not to resort to force, he made no attempt whatsoever to mislead him regarding the scope of the territorial and political objectives he sought to achieve; indeed, he did everything possible both to reassure him of his willingness to loyally honor the commitments made regarding Europe (the assurances conveyed by Aloisi on August 18 were repeatedly followed by others to the same effect), to acknowledge—even publicly—Italy's appreciation for the French stance, and, furthermore, to support France's efforts in Geneva as much as possible (assuring him that Italy would not leave the League of Nations and having the Italian delegation adopt a "moderate" line of conduct, thereby making it possible to establish the Commission of Five) and to accommodate some of his most pressing requests (such as the commitment by the Italians, in the event of war, not to bomb the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway).

If we add to this diplomatic action the fascist press's stance toward France—which differed completely in form and substance from its stance toward England (the first authoritative attack on Laval did not occur until December 29, in the pages of *Regime Fascista*, and deeply irritated Mussolini)—and the care taken by the Duce personally (through a series of interviews) and by the relevant offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Press and Propaganda to influence French public opinion and the press (which were already, in large sectors, favorably disposed toward accepting Italy's colonial demands and hostile to England's selfish and dangerous anti-Italian policy and to the anti-fascist speculations of the left) in favor of Italy and in support of Laval's policy, one can form a fairly precise idea of the importance France held in the strategy of those months and, by contrast, the severity of the blow that Mussolini's policy suffered first (in the second half of January 1936) from Laval's ouster from the government and then, above all, from the victory (on May 3, 1936) of the Popular Front.

In fact, Laval's fall deprived Mussolini of a sincere friend, while the victory of the Popular Front deprived him of France's active diplomatic support.

Military operations in Ethiopia began at 5:00 a.m. on October 3.

They were neither preceded nor accompanied by a formal declaration of war, since they were officially justified by the order for general mobilization signed on September 28 by the Negus.

Mussolini, however, had announced the operation in the late afternoon of October 2 in a speech from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, broadcast throughout Italy, and to which the party had mobilized all Italians to listen.

Like all of the Duce's most important speeches, this one, too, had been carefully crafted in every detail. Brief, forceful, and rousing, yet at the same time measured, since—as we have already noted—it dropped the hint of responding to economic sanctions with war and explicitly reaffirmed the regime's determination to prevent the conflict from escalating from a colonial to a European one:

A solemn hour is about to strike in the history of our homeland. Twenty million men are currently filling the squares throughout Italy.

Never in the history of humankind has such a colossal spectacle been witnessed. Twenty million men: one heart, one will, one resolve.

Their demonstration must prove—and does prove—to the world that Italy and Fascism constitute a perfect, absolute, and unalterable identity…

For many months now, the wheel of destiny, driven by our calm determination, has been moving toward its goal: in these very hours, its pace is faster and now unstoppable!

It is not merely an army advancing toward its objectives, but an entire people of forty-four million souls, against whom an attempt is being made to perpetrate the blackest of injustices: that of depriving us of our place in the sun.

When, in 1915, Italy threw itself into the fray and bound its fate to that of the Allies, how many tributes to our courage and how many promises were made! But after the shared victory—to which Italy had made the supreme sacrifice of six hundred thousand dead, four hundred thousand maimed, and one million wounded—at the table of the exorbitant peace treaty, Italy was granted nothing but meager crumbs from the rich colonial spoils of others.

We have been patient for thirteen years, during which the circle of selfishness suffocating our vitality has tightened even further. With Ethiopia, we have been patient for forty years! Enough is enough!…

But let it be said once again, in the most categorical terms—and I hereby make a sacred pledge before you—that we will do everything possible to ensure that this colonial conflict does not take on the character and scope of a European conflict. This may be the wish of those who see in a new war the vengeance for fallen temples, but not ours…

The League of Nations' response was immediate. Under British pressure, on October 7 the Geneva-based organization condemned Italy as the aggressor, and four days later fifty-two of its member states decided to impose economic sanctions (the only states that abstained were Austria, Hungary, and Albania): an embargo on arms and ammunition destined for Italy, a ban on any loans or credit, a prohibition on importing Italian goods, and a ban on exporting to Italy a whole range of products necessary for the war industry.

The list of these products was drawn up in the following days: for the time being, it was decided that petroleum, industrial alcohol, and certain other products widely used in civilian industry would be excluded.

At the same time, at the suggestion of the Belgian representative, it was decided to entrust France and England with the task of attempting to resolve the conflict, if possible even before the sanctions took effect, which was set for November 18.

In Rome, the adoption of economic sanctions was a foregone conclusion, and efforts had long been underway to mitigate their impact as much as possible. Measures had been taken many months earlier, first in anticipation of wartime needs and then in preparation for the possibility of having to cope with the sanctions.

As early as mid-February, the new Minister of Finance, P. Thaon di Revel (who had succeeded Jung the previous month), had subjected all imports to extremely strict controls. Previously, the monopoly on foreign exchange trading had been reinstated, and everyone—banks, firms, corporations, and legal entities—had been required to transfer their foreign receivables to the state.

In May, one of the most knowledgeable financial experts, Felice Guarneri, had been appointed Superintendent of Foreign Exchange (in January 1936, the Superintendency was elevated to the rank of Undersecretariat under the Prime Minister's Office) with powers—by Mussolini's explicit will—that were virtually dictatorial.

Two months later, to maximize the purchase of necessary raw materials and products abroad and to build up the corresponding stockpiles, the requirement for the Bank of Italy to maintain a reserve of gold and hard currency amounting to no less than 40% of the money supply was suspended.

At the same time, the General Commissariat for War Production was established, headed by General Alfredo Dallolio, who had been in charge of the same sector during World War I and had been granted such extensive powers and authority that, along with Guarneri, he became one of the top officials responsible for the national economy.

Once hostilities began, these measures were supplemented by others aimed at achieving the greatest possible savings by the state, utilizing all national resources, avoiding waste and non-essential consumption, and mobilizing public opinion politically in this regard (collection of gold, scrap iron, etc.), to counter, at least in part, the inevitable rise in prices, to increase production and employment, and to plan the necessary economic effort—taking into account not only the immediate wartime needs but also its social repercussions and the opportunities it offered to take advantage of the economic siege to steer the country toward "economic autonomy," to expand the scope of state intervention in the economy and, at the same time, to revitalize the image of a Fascism poised to resume its advance in the social sphere as well, and to satisfy those Fascists who saw in the conquest of the empire the beginning of a new "era" of Fascism—not only and not so much on the international stage but also and above all on the economic and social front.

From a general political perspective, this second set of measures foreshadowed what would become the autarkic policy and was also linked to the attempt to better define and implement the tasks and objectives of the corporatist system.

Since we will have to address these issues at length in the next volume, it suffices here to recall the speech Mussolini delivered on March 23, 1936, on the occasion of the second national assembly of the Corporations, regarding the new prospects opened up by the sanctions for the regime's economic policy.

In it, in fact, the Duce not only affirmed that November 18, 1935—the official date the sanctions took effect—marked the beginning of "a new phase in Italian history" dominated by a new principle: "to achieve, in the shortest possible time, the greatest possible autonomy in the nation's economic life," but he also took care to provide both the fundamental political justification for this new phase and a broad outline of its future course. As for the political justification, Mussolini was as certain as he was unequivocal: it was inevitable that sooner or later Italy would be called upon to face a great "warlike ordeal":

When? How? No one can say, but the wheel of fate turns swiftly. If this were not the case, how could one explain the policy of massive rearmament undertaken by all nations? This dramatic possibility must guide all our actions. In the current historical period, the reality of war is, together with the doctrine of fascism, a determining factor in the state's stance toward the nation's economy.

From this perspective, it was evident that, while the ideal of absolute economic autonomy was unattainable and likely unproductive, every nation must nevertheless seek "to free itself, to the greatest extent possible, from foreign servitude." And it was equally evident that the State must seek to control

and regulate the national economy in order to achieve this objective as quickly and effectively as possible:

As I said in Milan in October 1934, the Fascist regime does not intend to nationalize or, worse, bureaucratize the nation's entire economy; it is sufficient for it to control and regulate it through the corporations, whose activities—which I have closely followed—have yielded great results and offer the conditions for further methodical development. The corporations are organs of the State, but not merely bureaucratic organs of the State.

As for the vision of what was to be the new phase of Italian history, the speech was obviously less explicit, even though Mussolini spoke of a veritable "regulatory plan for the Italian economy in the coming Fascist era" and carefully avoided even touching upon the problem of how this "regulatory plan" could be harmonized—beyond present and future wartime needs—ideologically and politically with what he himself had advocated in the recent past, when he had made rural policy and the fight against "supercapitalism" the cornerstone of "Fascist humanism."

Apart from a rather vague commitment to "address and resolve" the problem of farm laborers, agriculture emerged from Mussolini's speech as the sector in which the state essentially planned to innovate the least and, ultimately, to commit the least resources—except to help it achieve "ever-higher production averages":

The fundamental sector of agriculture is not, by its very nature, susceptible to significant changes. There will be no substantial innovation in the traditional forms of the Italian agricultural economy: they serve their purpose well, which is to ensure the food supply for the Italian people and to provide certain raw materials to industry. The agricultural economy therefore remains a privately-run economy, regulated and supported by the state so that it can achieve ever-higher production averages, and harmonized through the guilds with the rest of the national economy.

The problem of tenant farmers and farm laborers must be addressed and resolved along the lines that Fascism has already laid out.

As for other economic activities, credit ("which is to the economy as blood is to the human body") was to be "entirely under the jurisdiction of the State"; the same could be said for foreign trade; while for domestic trade, practically nothing or almost nothing would have changed; the same would have held true (apart from greater "corporate self-discipline," applicable to all sectors) for crafts and small and

medium-sized industry. The only real innovations would, in practice, have taken place at the level of large-scale industry, whether private or state-directed:

As for large-scale industry that works directly or indirectly for the defense of the nation and has raised its capital through stock subscriptions, and for the other industries that have developed to the point of becoming capitalist or super-capitalist—which poses problems that are no longer of an economic nature but rather social—it will be organized into large units corresponding to what are called “key industries” and will assume a special status within the sphere of the State. This process in Italy will be facilitated by the fact that the state already holds, through IRI, significant stakes and, in some cases, a majority of the share capital of the major industrial groups involved in national defense.

Will state intervention in these large industrial units be direct or indirect? Will it take the form of management or control? In some sectors, it may involve direct management; in others, indirect management; and in still others, effective control. One might also consider joint ventures, in which the state and private entities jointly provide the capital and manage the enterprises together.

It is perfectly logical that, in the fascist state, these industrial groups should cease to have—even de jure—the character of private enterprises that they have, de facto, completely lost since 1930–31.

These industries—due to their nature, scale, and decisive importance for the war effort—transcend the boundaries of the private economy and enter the realm of the state or parastatal economy. The products they supply have a single buyer: the state. We are moving toward a period during which these industries will have neither the time nor the opportunity to produce for private consumption, but will have to work exclusively—or almost exclusively—for the nation’s war effort.

There is also a purely moral reason that inspires our considerations: the Fascist regime does not permit individuals or companies to profit from an event that imposes the most severe sacrifices on the nation. The sad phenomenon of profiteering will no longer occur in Italy.

This constitutional transformation of a vast and important sector of our economy will be carried out without haste, calmly, but with fascist resolve.

Regarding the social and political implications of this “regulatory plan,” Mussolini highlighted

essentially two in the final part of his speech. And he addressed both in very general terms. On the social level, greater justice would be achieved:

In this economy, which necessarily takes on various forms—just as the economy of any highly civilized nation is diverse—workers, with equal rights and equal duties, become partners in the enterprise on the same footing as capital providers or technical managers. In the Fascist era, labor, in its infinite manifestations, becomes the sole yardstick by which the social and national utility of individuals and groups is measured.

An economy such as the one I have outlined in broad strokes must be able to guarantee peace of mind, well-being, and material and moral advancement to the countless masses that make up the nation and who have demonstrated, in these times, their high degree of national consciousness and their total adherence to the regime.

In the Fascist system, the gaps between the various categories of producers must and will narrow, as they recognize the hierarchies of the highest duty and the gravest responsibility.

The fascist economy will bring about that highest form of social justice which, since time immemorial, has been the yearning of the multitudes engaged in a bitter, daily struggle with the most basic necessities of life.

On the political level, the new economic structure would have resulted in the abolition of the old and now anachronistic Chamber of Deputies and its replacement with a new Chamber of Fasci and Corporations. Mussolini, however, remained entirely vague on this point, carefully avoiding any somewhat binding predictions:

The manner in which the new representative and legislative assembly will be formed, the rules governing its operation, its powers, its prerogatives, and its authority constitute issues of both a doctrinal and technical nature, which will be examined by the regime's supreme body: the Grand Council.

This assembly will be entirely "political," since almost all economic problems can only be resolved by bringing them onto the political plane.

On the other hand, the forces that might—perhaps somewhat arbitrarily—be called “extra-economic” will be represented by the Party and by recognized associations.

Now you will ask me when this profound—yet already well-developed—constitutional transformation will take place, and I reply that the date is not far off, though it is linked to the victorious conclusion of the war in Africa and to developments in European politics.

After this brief mention of the measures in the second group—those that are less immediate and not directly linked to the needs of the war in Ethiopia—let us now return to our main topic and the consequences of the sanctions. Regarding these consequences, one point seems to us to require clarification: the sanctions, as established by the League of Nations in October, were certainly such as to create considerable difficulties for the Italian economy; however, they could not—both because they did not include certain essential raw materials, such as oil, and because of the countermeasures taken by Italy—prevent Mussolini from sustaining and waging his war, certainly throughout 1936 and, albeit with increasing hardship, even longer.

This was all the more true given that there were many indications that several sanctioning states would not enforce them strictly (since they harmed their own trade and, in the long run, could lead to their exclusion from the Italian market by other countries) and, above all, because Austria, Hungary, and Albania—and, far more importantly, they did not bind states that were not members of the League of Nations, particularly Germany, the United States, Brazil, and Japan.

In this situation, the real problem for Mussolini was not so much the sanctions approved in October, but rather that—despite opposition from France and a segment of the British ruling class itself—the government in London, under pressure from its own public opinion and certain circles within the “national” majority—whose most authoritative representative was Eden—would sooner or later decide to persuade the League of Nations to tighten the sanctions, extending them even to products—such as oil—that had initially been excluded, and to make every effort to convince Brazil and, above all, the United States to take measures of their own against Italian foreign trade. In this case, in fact, Italy’s economic situation would have quickly become unsustainable, and Mussolini—as he himself confessed to Hitler a few years later—would have had to “beat a retreat” from Ethiopia, with all the consequences that such a setback would have had for the Fascist regime and his own power.

If one bears in mind this dramatic prospect (far more real than that of a direct conflict with England, which Mussolini was absolutely unable to face and to which the British government had no need to resort, given that, if it had been convinced that it was indispensable and useful to stop the Duce at any cost, it would have sufficed to put France in a tight spot and have the League of Nations approve the extension of sanctions), one realizes that the immediate economic problems caused by the sanctions were certainly not the most significant challenges Mussolini faced during the months of the war.

Here, it is certainly not possible to go into detail about what was done to try to compensate for the decline in foreign trade, nor about how attempts were made (and were partly successful) to circumvent the sanctions (often with the explicit or tacit connivance of the sanctioning countries themselves), nor, above all, about how steps were taken to increase trade with non-sanctioning countries.

Just as with the issue of sanctions, it is difficult to count the military problem among the most important challenges Mussolini had to face; therefore, given what we have discussed in the preceding pages, our discussion of it can be relatively brief.

As paradoxical as it may seem at first glance, for the Duce—given the state of the international situation in general and relations with England in particular at the outbreak of hostilities—the military aspect of the war had become secondary to the political-diplomatic one. Even setting aside both a widening of the conflict and the extension of sanctions—two possibilities that would have radically altered the course of operations or brought them to an end ipso facto— the military objective that Mussolini set out to achieve at the start of hostilities—and for months afterward, practically until the eve of Ethiopia's collapse and the Negus's flight—was by then (and, in our view, had essentially always been) not to secure a total victory and annex all of Ethiopia, but the far more limited goal that Laval had also suggested to him: to secure a few major victories and occupy the regions of greatest interest to him, so as to compel both the Negus and England—the League of Nations—to negotiate a settlement of the conflict more advantageous than those already proposed to him. This was all the more true because, in a blitzkrieg, he not only could not believe (since virtually all military experts—and his own generals along with them—considered it impossible) but he also had no political desire for it (even though, in hindsight, he extolled it and took pride in it), given that it would almost certainly have dashed his never-abandoned hopes of mending relations with England and reaching a general agreement with it.

In this situation, military operations largely ceased to serve as the primary and decisive instrument for victory (and, consequently, also lost some of their potential to be organized according to a clearly defined strategy), instead becoming a supporting element of Mussolini's political and diplomatic maneuvering, to which they therefore had to be as closely aligned as possible.

A typical example of this is the clear priority initially given to the Eritrean front (which centered on the regions closest to Mussolini's heart) over the Somali front, which gained importance only later and largely due to Graziani's initiative and for personal reasons linked to jealousies and power struggles within the Fascist leadership.

Even more typical is the way in which the Duce intervened in the management of military operations.

Once hostilities began, on October 6, troops from Eritrea occupied Adwa. Psychologically, the conquest of this town was undoubtedly a major propaganda success, especially at home, where the name Adwa resonated deeply with everyone. Militarily, however, it was a modest success, all the more so because the advance practically came to a halt at Adwa; politically, it was irrelevant, given that, in view of any potential negotiations (and to expedite them), Mussolini needed to secure possession of at least a large part of Tigray (and, if possible, demonstrate that its population preferred Italy to Ethiopia —which was the reason behind all the efforts made to ensure the submission of the descendants of Negus Giovanni and the appointment of Ras Gugsà as the civilian head of the occupied territories).

It was these necessities that prompted him to immediately order De Bono to proceed without delay with the conquest of Axum (which, due to its status as a sacred city for the Ethiopians, England was

absolutely unwilling to include among the territories to be ceded to Italy) and, once Axum was taken on October 16, to resume the offensive in early November so as to be in Macallé by mid-month, when—with the British elections having taken place and the sanctions having gone into effect—it could reasonably be expected that the political-diplomatic machinery would be set in motion again.

And, having captured Macallé on November 9, the decision was made to push even further south, as far as Amba Alagi (another name, moreover, almost as evocative for the Italians as that of Adwa) and, almost simultaneously, authorization was granted to Graziani to use gas, if necessary to break the deadlock on the southern front: "I authorize the use of gas as a last resort to overcome enemy resistance and in the event of a counterattack."

Faced with this relentless pressure, it has often been claimed that Mussolini was desperately seeking victories for reasons of prestige. In absolute terms, this statement is certainly not incorrect. Indeed, it is obvious that, at that difficult moment, military victories were very convenient for the Duce—and, moreover, victories that would reawaken and erase old, sad memories among Italians.

However, it would be wrong to limit the explanation to this alone. Mussolini was neither so short-sighted nor so eager for success at any cost. This is demonstrated by the willingness he showed—despite everything—to accept De Bono's point of view on more than one occasion, as well as the delays and technical justifications De Bono offered for not immediately fulfilling his requests; and, above all, it is demonstrated by the second part of his telegram to De Bono himself on November 12: "While awaiting the successful conclusion of the political negotiations, reinforce the Macallé line and quickly secure the rear."

Today we know that on that very same day Mussolini had decided to replace De Bono with Badoglio as commander of the Eritrean front.

However, this does not justify the conclusion that this decision prompted the sending of the telegram just cited. Logic does not support this, because, if one accepts the viewpoint of those who have argued that he was seeking successes for reasons of prestige, it is impossible to imagine that the Duce would have been willing to forgo continuing operations until Badoglio had taken command; and above all, it is not supported by Aloisi's diary, which as early as October 28 informs us that Mussolini intended to suspend military operations after the capture of Macallé and to reach an agreement with the British.

In light of these considerations, it is clear that many prevailing views on the Ethiopian War must be revised.

It is commonly believed that Mussolini aimed, first and foremost, at the complete conquest of that country; on the contrary, one must realize that by the end of 1935, his plans were far more limited, which explains—as we shall see—why he would have been willing to accept the Laval-Hoare plan and why, even after that plan fell through and even after the remilitarization of the Rhineland, which eliminated the last dangers of a British hardline stance, he would have continued to seek, right up to the end, an agreement with the Negus and with England that would ensure Italy's political and economic dominance in Ethiopia and the direct occupation of a vast area of the country, while formally preserving a small Ethiopian state.

Perhaps the specific circumstances surrounding the replacement of De Bono with Badoglio also warrant reconsideration.

In the context of prevailing opinions, this replacement has a single rationale: De Bono was not only too cautious and reluctant to decisively go on the offensive, but he was generally held in very low esteem as a strategist, was disliked by Badoglio and by some of his own collaborators, and lacked a power base behind him. Badoglio, on the other hand, offered greater technical expertise, enjoyed prestige, and was able to reassure and satisfy the crown, the more traditionalist circles, and, at the same time, broad sectors of public opinion: in a word, with him, the war in Ethiopia transformed from a “Fascist” war into a national war.

There is certainly some truth to all of this. In light of what we have said, however, a question arises: by replacing the Quadrumvir De Bono with Marshal Badoglio, was Mussolini truly thinking above all of future operations and the future victories that Badoglio would achieve, or—believing the phase of major military operations to be essentially over—did he essentially want to offer a sop to the army (and to Badoglio himself, who made no secret of his desire to take De Bono’s place), believing, moreover, that he had secured the true laurels of war for the Fascist Party and was leaving Badoglio the crumbs of managing the final and least important cycle of operations—the one, in practice, intended only to serve as a counterpoint to the decisive phase of diplomatic negotiations that he believed would begin after the British elections?

This is all the more likely given that two facts—which, in our view, are far from negligible—support this question.

The first concerns the choice of Badoglio as De Bono’s successor: is it plausible to believe that, had he anticipated a war that would still be long and fraught with potential complications with England, Mussolini would have deprived himself of his best military commander—who, moreover, was also the Chief of the General Staff—by sending him thousands of kilometers away?

The second concerns the insistence with which Mussolini urged Badoglio in December to resume the offensive and occupy Amba Alagi—an insistence that might seem to contradict our assertion that he considered the cycle of major operations to be practically over at that time. In reality, this insistence is entirely logical: in December, in fact, the potential capture of Amba Alagi would have constituted a very significant success for the Duce, given that the Laval-Hoare plan was taking shape precisely during those days, and a nudge to the Ethiopians—and, indirectly, to those in London who viewed the plan with suspicion—would have facilitated its successful implementation.

This does not, however, mean that at that moment Mussolini was considering a straightforward resumption of large-scale operations.

In fact, he made this decision only in January—when the possibility of reaching a settlement of the conflict based on the Laval-Hoare plan had faded—and even then he did not exert particular pressure on Badoglio to speed up the process or to seek a large-scale confrontation at all costs. And from that time onward, his interference in the conduct of operations was essentially political in nature, aimed at authorizing or preventing those forms of warfare or specific initiatives (the use of asphyxiating gases, retaliatory bombings, attacks on the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway, the establishment of bases on Lake Tana, etc.) which, depending on the particular international political climate, he deemed appropriate or counterproductive to adopt.

This provides further confirmation that the real issue for him was essentially a political-diplomatic one, in relation to which all others—including the military aspect—were either secondary or subordinate. So much so that after the Battle of Lake Ascianghi (late March–early April 1936), which from a military

standpoint decided the outcome of the conflict, his main efforts were directed—as we shall see—toward initiating direct negotiations with the Negus, and only when he realized that this was impossible did he resolve to urge Badoglio and Graziani to rush through the final stages and march on the capital.

And now we come to the political-diplomatic front, which constituted Mussolini's real problem throughout the war and which caused him the greatest concerns and more than a few moments of uncertainty and pessimism.

The Duce had decided to launch military operations because, at the point he had reached, remaining inactive would have meant losing credibility both at home and abroad, allowing anyone to claim he was bluffing—and all of this, given British intransigence, would have yielded no advantage whatsoever, since it is clear that, after having rejected London's offers three times, only forceful action could induce England to raise the price it was willing to pay.

Despite his conviction that London would not become directly involved, he was nevertheless well aware of the danger of the step he was taking. From the outset, therefore, all his efforts were directed not only toward reassuring the British government of his willingness not to break the "Stresa front" and to reach an agreement to resolve the conflict as soon as possible, but also toward taking concrete action toward that end.

In the first regard, perhaps the most significant act was the letter delivered by Grandi to Hoare on October 4, in which Mussolini reaffirmed his desire to cooperate with England on European policy, proposed a "mutual and simultaneous" demobilization in the Mediterranean, and stated that he was ready to seek a solution to the Ethiopian problem. The political substance of this letter was revealed the following day by Mussolini himself during an interview with the correspondent for *Paris-Soir*, Jules Sauerwein.

In the second regard, the most important initiative was certainly the one taken on October 16 to inform De Chambrun of the terms on which Italy was willing to negotiate a resolution to the conflict, so that Laval could effectively act as an intermediary and mediator with the British.

In essence, the terms of the agreement transmitted to Paris mirrored the previous demands: the definitive and full cession of the northern Ethiopian territories occupied by Italian troops; the revision of the Dankala and Somali borders in Italy's favor; a mandate or other form of administration over the non-Amharic peripheral zones of Ethiopia so as to establish territorial contiguity between Eritrea and Somalia; and a commercial outlet for Ethiopia at Assab.

Concurrent with these overtures toward London, the efforts of Mussolini and the Palazzo Chigi during this period were directed primarily in two other directions: to pressure the various governments imposing sanctions to ensure an amicable application of the sanctions (while also highlighting the serious consequences that any extension of the sanctions would entail) and, even more so, to avert the danger of an embargo by the United States.

Throughout the Italian-Ethiopian conflict, Washington consistently maintained a very cautious stance. The United States' first official statement came on August 1, when the American president expressed his hope that an amicable solution would be found and that peace would be preserved. Subsequently, Roosevelt sent a message to Mussolini to this effect and secured his country's approval of neutrality toward both sides and an embargo on all supplies of arms and ammunition.

During the Paris talks in mid-August, the U.S. government had offered its good offices to help broker an agreement, and shortly thereafter, Roosevelt had the embassy in Rome take a further conciliatory step. In practice, however, the U.S. had sought to avoid becoming entangled in the dispute.

A typical example of this was the stance taken by the State Department when the “Rickett affair” broke out: Washington immediately advised canceling the contract. Nor had this position changed substantially with the outbreak of hostilities. Hence the pressure from the British to induce the Americans to adopt a more actively uncompromising stance, and from the Italians to prevent it.

In this dual maneuver, however, it was Mussolini who effectively prevailed, and this constituted one of his greatest successes, which had a very significant influence on the entire course of the war, since the U.S. stance ultimately contributed greatly to strengthening the position of those opposed to extending the sanctions, since such a decision would have lost much of its significance if it had not been endorsed by Washington and Italy had been able to continue sourcing oil and other raw materials from America.

To understand this stance of the U.S. government, three main reasons must be kept in mind: first of all, the largely pro-Fascist sentiment among Italians and, more importantly, among Italian-Americans living in the U.S.—an attitude that, at that particular moment, on the eve of the presidential election, made the “Italian vote” particularly valuable to Roosevelt; second, the widely held belief that, if an oil embargo were imposed, it would be respected by the major oil companies but very unlikely to be observed by the smaller ones; and finally, the essentially pro-Italian stance of the ambassador in Rome, B. Long, for whom the situation could be summarized as follows: the war was immoral and it was right that Italy had been condemned; however, the League of Nations’ condemnation had come about solely due to British pressure, and Britain had no greater moral justification than Italy did; the situation was extremely grave, and the United States had to stay out of it; after all, England was secretly supplying Italy with oil, via Germany, and directly supplying Italian ships at Suez.

On the British side, the initial response to Mussolini’s overtures was decidedly negative. The rapid deterioration of Anglo-Italian relations had been viewed by a large part of the conservative ruling class with concern and disappointment.

As Taylor wrote, faced with the Geneva decision to impose sanctions, conservatives in England were dismayed, military leaders grumbled, and the Foreign Office did the same. Winston Churchill remained outside England throughout the fall, thus avoiding taking a stance for or against Italy. Amery denounced the League and supported Italy’s cause.

However, the voices supporting Italy were few and were overwhelmed by those opposed. Elections were now just around the corner: even setting aside the fundamental contradictions in its policy toward Italy, the Labour Party and the Liberals—and, more importantly, a large portion of public opinion—were too hostile toward Italy and fascism for the government to risk even considering Mussolini’s overtures; thus, both Baldwin and Eden adopted an intransigent stance.

Only Hoare, speaking with Grandi on October 17, showed himself to be open to the possibility: when Grandi accused England of preparing for war against Italy, Hoare categorically denied this interpretation of his government’s policy and declared himself willing to consider any Italian proposals for a resolution of the conflict.

Nevertheless, given the pressure from France, two experts (the Englishman Peterson and the Frenchman Saint-Quintin) examined the Italian demands, concluding that the idea of certain border

adjustments and an Italian mandate over the entire Ethiopian territory south of the eighth parallel (in exchange for a seaport at Assab or Zeila) could be considered.

These proposals, however, were flatly rejected by the British government on October 30. After the mid-November elections, which re-elected the “national” majority, thereby freeing it from the pressure of competition from the Labour Party and the various pacifist associations, pro-corporate, and more or less explicitly anti-fascist groups associated with them, the talks were nevertheless resumed, even though a faction of the government, led by Eden, continued to oppose any compromise and, indeed, advocated the strict enforcement of sanctions and their extension to include oil. Hoare and Vansittart were the most determined to find a resolution to the conflict.

It was against this backdrop of disagreement among British leaders that the Laval-Hoare plan was conceived.

The first phase of its preparation took place in the utmost secrecy (it seems that the only people in the know were, on the one hand, Baldwin and Hoare, and, on the other, Mussolini) during the last ten days of November and the very first days of December, carried out by Vansittart and Grandi. Given his skill, the high regard in which he was held among British leaders, and his keen desire to prevent the crisis between the two countries from turning into a complete and definitive rupture—which would ultimately have dismantled the League of Nations, disrupted the entire European balance of power, and driven Mussolini into Hitler’s arms—the Italian ambassador in London was certainly the most suitable man to attempt a settlement.

The same was true of the Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, for whom the European balance of power and Austrian independence mattered more than anything else at that moment.

The talks were anything but easy. At first, Vansittart did not seem willing to go beyond these five points:

1. Adjustment of the Eritrean border with the annexation of Adwa and Adigrat (excluding Aksum).

2. Annexation of Dankalia and the Ogaden to Italy.

3. Granting Italy an economic monopoly over certain territories east of the 38th meridian and south of the 8th parallel.

4. An international assistance regime for Ethiopia with Italian predominance.

5. Cession to Ethiopia, within Italian territory, of an outlet to the sea and a connecting route between this outlet and Ethiopia.

Later, however, his position softened. In a comprehensive report on the negotiations that Grandi drafted for Mussolini on December 7, we read:

Your Excellency will have noted how, little by little during the conversations held with him, Vansittart has gradually broadened his ideas: from a petty border adjustment in the region of Adwa and Adigrat, he has moved on to the idea of separating the Tigrayan regions that we currently occupy from Ethiopia,

and annexing those regions to Italy through the application of the principle of self-determination.

From granting Italy sovereignty over the Ogaden and an economic monopoly over certain territories east of the 38th meridian, he has come to consider the possibility of separating all territories south of the 8th parallel from Ethiopia, accepting the idea that territories west of the 39th meridian would come under Italian jurisdiction and those east of the 39th meridian under Italian sovereignty. Finally, he was persuaded to agree to discuss the territorial union of Eritrea and Somalia via Harrar and Ausa, without ruling out—as he had done until now—the possibility that the British Government might agree to resolve this issue, which is essential for us.

In conclusion, having started from the assertion that the British Government considered the ideas set forth by the Duce to Chambrun on October 16 to be absolutely unacceptable for the purposes of any and all negotiations, Vansittart nevertheless proceeded, one after another, to make—if not concessions, then at least valuable admissions—which, taken together, constitute a significant rapprochement with the Duce's Terms of Agreement of October 16.

After this decisive preparatory phase, the drafting of the plan passed into the hands of the two politicians from whom it subsequently took its name.

On December 7, Hoare (officially traveling to Switzerland for a vacation) went to Paris. There, with Vansittart also present, the British Foreign Secretary finalized the plan with Laval.

On the evening of the following day, a joint communiqué announced that the two statesmen, "moved by an equal spirit of conciliation and inspired by the deep Franco-British friendship" (that friendship which, along with the resolution of the conflict, was closest to Hoare's heart and was perhaps the strongest motivating factor that led him to force the hand of some of his colleagues in the government), had sought "formulas that could serve as a basis for an amicable solution to the Italian-Ethiopian dispute."

Their conclusions were to be submitted to the British government and, if approved, to the governments concerned and to the League of Nations. The British government met on the evening of the 9th; some of its members were reluctant to approve the plan, since it gave Mussolini virtually full satisfaction and, for better or worse, would constitute a very serious setback for the Geneva system.

According to the Laval-Hoare plan, Ethiopia was to cede to Italy eastern Tigray and a series of territories on the borders between Dankalia and Eritrea and between the Ogaden and Somalia (specifically indicated), receiving in exchange an outlet to the sea "preferably" at Assab. In addition, Italy would be assigned a zone "for economic expansion and colonization" within territory under Ethiopian sovereignty—more precisely, the area bounded on the east by the new Somali-Ethiopian border, on the north by the 8th parallel, on the west by the 35th meridian, and on the south by the border between Ethiopia and Kenya.

In the end, however, the plan was approved, both to avoid contradicting Hoare and, above all, to prevent a further deterioration of relations with France, given that Laval had indicated his intention to withdraw support for the sanctions if the plan were not carried forward (and in the early hours of the 10th, he formally informed London that he wanted an explicit commitment that, if Ethiopia did not accept the plan, there would be no further discussion of extending the sanctions).

Finally approved, the Laval-Hoare plan was transmitted on December 11 to Rome and Addis Ababa (whose government rejected it on the 18th) and the following day to Geneva. Even before it was delivered to the parties concerned, however, rumors and assessments—generally unfavorable to both its content and its political significance—began to circulate in the British and French press (most likely at the instigation of officials at the Quai d'Orsay who were hostile to Laval for reasons of domestic politics). Within a few days, these negative reactions became increasingly numerous, partly due to the deliberate maneuvering of those within the British government who wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to get rid of Hoare, and in just over a week, the Laval plan—perhaps undeservedly—failed-Hoare plan amid a storm of protests which, on the one hand, allowed Eden and those who shared his position to reopen the debate on the plan within the government, leading to Hoare's resignation on December 18 (he was replaced at the Foreign Office by Eden himself), and, on the other hand, its rejection by the League of Nations, and, yet again, a significant weakening in France of Laval's political and parliamentary position (who was in fact forced to resign a month later for a variety of reasons, including his involvement in the plan).

In Rome, as mentioned, the plan had been transmitted on the afternoon of December 11. At Palazzo Chigi, the general terms had already been received from Paris. Suvich had discussed it at length that same day with Mussolini, who—according to Aloisi—had found it "quite bad" and had decided to submit it to the Grand Council.

This decision alone suggests that, in reality, he was not opposed to accepting it—albeit only in principle—hoping, that is, to secure something more during the negotiations. If Eden's account were confirmed—namely, that when Hoare and Laval drafted the plan in Paris, the French president had repeatedly contacted the Duce by telephone—this assumption would become virtually a certainty.

In this case, the criticisms leveled against it during a lengthy meeting held on December 14 by Suvich, Aloisi, Guariglia, Buti, and other officials at Palazzo Chigi—and which Suvich summarized in a detailed memo "for His Excellency the Head of Government"—would obviously lose much of their significance and would serve only to highlight the "careerists'"—as they were called—African ambitions and how they nevertheless realized the negative consequences that the plan's rejection could have for Italy. Be that as it may, the result of the deliberations by Mussolini and his collaborators between December 11 and 15 was the sending of a telegram to the embassies in Paris and London in which, after stating that "in principle" Mussolini was willing to "discuss possible solutions to the Ethiopian problem," instructions were given to sound out Laval and the British on a series of points which, in essence, were intended to pave the way for an adjustment of the borders in Tigray, Dankalia, and the Ogaden; a more precise definition of the concept of "economic expansion and colonization"; and, above all, the inclusion of a requirement for Ethiopia to disarm.

However, when Laval replied to these requests that his task was complete and that they should, if at all, be presented in Geneva—and, on a purely personal note, added an invitation to accept the plan—

Mussolini's reaction was quite telling: he telegraphed London stating that he could not give a response until after the meeting of the Grand Council—scheduled for the evening of the 18th—and requesting that, in light of this and given that a debate on foreign policy was to take place in the House of Commons on the 19th, which could influence the decision in Geneva, the discussion of the plan itself at the League of Nations be postponed.

As Guariglia rightly wrote, everything suggests that from the very beginning Mussolini intended to accept the Laval-Hoare plan. The Duce simply felt the need to secure explicit support from his own people to prevent them from claiming they were not responsible—he wanted to commit them to supporting his policy, knowing full well that if it were not crowned with success, he would find them all against him, or at least all ready to wash their hands of the matter.

Hence his decision to submit the plan, at least formally, to the Grand Council, even though he was so convinced of the wisdom of accepting it that on the afternoon before the meeting he prepared, together with Suvich, the agenda to be released to the press the following morning:

The Grand Council of Fascism, meeting on the evening of December 18, Year XIV, to examine the appeal addressed by the governments of France and England to the Duce, declares that it appreciates the spirit of friendship that inspired the communication made by the two aforementioned governments to the Italian government in seeking a solution to the Italian-Abyssinian conflict.

It takes note of the explicit statements made by the British and French governments defining the nature of these proposals.

It decides to consider the proposals in question as a possible basis for discussion, leaving it to the government to formulate the necessary reservations to safeguard the rights of the Nation.

This agenda, however, never saw the light of day. The postponement of the formal decision to respond positively to London and Paris—though not unjustified, given that, in the face of the press campaign unleashed by the plan's opponents, it was logical that Mussolini would first want to see whether Laval and Hoare were able to control the situation and whether they still felt inclined to press the Negus—ended up, in fact, to derail the Laval-Hoare plan, which, had it been immediately accepted by Mussolini, would almost certainly have succeeded, given that a large portion of its opponents, faced with the choice between peace and war, would have found a way to distance themselves from the most hardline factions and justify their shift to the side of its supporters.

The Grand Council, as was customary, met on the evening of December 18, with all its members present except Balbo, Bottai, and Grandi, who were in Libya, Ethiopia, and England, respectively. That morning, Mussolini had attended the inauguration of Pontinia, the third municipality in the reclaimed

Agro Romano. On this occasion, he had delivered a ceremonial speech that included several remarks on the ongoing war, such as “a people of forty-four million—not merely inhabitants, but souls—will not allow itself to be strangled with impunity, much less deceived” and “the regime will press on,” which, though purely rhetorical, he had felt compelled to utter with the intention of later shifting the responsibility for the decision made a few hours later onto the Grand Council, if necessary.

This partly explains some of the doubts and differences of opinion that emerged within the PNF’s supreme body. In the Grand Council, the debate was extensive and lively. As De Bono noted in his diary, the majority voted in favor of accepting the plan. Among them were those—such as De Stefani, Federzoni, and Volpi—who had been opposed to the war from the outset; however, they were joined by others who had initially been in favor of the war. And if their numbers were not greater, it was due to the impact of the Pontinia speech and the open—if not problematic, to say the least, ambiguous—manner in which Mussolini had introduced the discussion, dwelling, moreover, insistently on the great military potential of the army fighting in Africa. Among those opposed were Farinacci and Cianetti.

However, no formal decision was reached. Around midnight, in fact, while De Stefani was speaking, Mussolini was informed that Grandi had telephoned from London with the news of Hoare’s resignation. Faced with this new development, Mussolini decided to buy some time and postponed the decision until the session two evenings later.

According to the fascist account, the next day Mussolini reportedly expressed his satisfaction with how the Laval-Hoare plan had turned out and told Lessona, who had come to him for the daily briefing: “You see, Lessona, the Negus and England have saved us from an awkward situation. So it’s not us who are causing the Hoare-Laval plan to fail.”

In fact, for two days—until it became clear that the plan had indeed failed—no decision was made at Palazzo Chigi, and there were still serious considerations about accepting it, if only to demonstrate goodwill, improve Italy’s position regarding a possible proposal to extend sanctions, and establish a starting point “in the event of a possible resumption of negotiations.”

Nor, on closer inspection, was an explicit rejection of the plan included in the agenda approved by the Grand Council at its December 20 session: In fact, it referred to “rejection by the British,” noted that on the 18th the plan had been “subjected to extensive examination” (without, however, specifying the outcome), and proclaimed that “the action of Fascist Italy will continue with unyielding determination to achieve the goals set by the Duce for the destiny of the Fatherland,” but nothing more.

In practice, Italians only learned officially that the Duce considered the Laval-Hoare plan “far from meeting Italy’s minimum requirements, especially from the standpoint of the security of its borders and Italian subjects” from the communiqué regarding the December 30 meeting of the Council of Ministers, which, moreover, explicitly emphasized that “in any case” the plan had fallen through before the Grand Council had been able to examine it and that the causes of its failure were “all to be found beyond Italy’s borders.”

They only learned of this, therefore, when Mussolini was absolutely certain that the plan was dead and beyond resurrection. And this is certainly not without significance.

Just how much the Duce had counted on the Laval-Hoare plan to bring the Ethiopian affair to a close is indirectly demonstrated by the discouragement that seized him immediately after its failure and, above all, by the serious difficulties into which his policy found itself. For several weeks, Mussolini and his

closest collaborators struggled in a situation that was not only extremely difficult but, in more ways than one, seemed hopeless and dependent solely on the fortunes of war.

A fate that, at that moment, offered little cause for optimism, both because of the stalemate in military operations (the first successes came only in mid-January at the hands of Graziani, and serious hope for a genuine turning point did not emerge until a month later, with Badoglio's victories at Tembien and the occupation of Amba Alagi), nor because, in a political situation with no immediate prospects, even potential military successes risked—especially after the agitation stirred up in various countries and in Geneva circles by the Laval-Hoare plan and the extremely heated controversies surrounding it, and following Eden's appointment to the Foreign Office—exacerbating the situation itself, in the sense of encouraging the adoption of further measures aimed at stopping Italy.

This possibility had been widely discussed in November and the very first days of December, but the Laval-Hoare plan had caused it to be set aside for a time; now, however, it was back on the agenda and became even more so in the third ten-day period of January, partly in relation to the schedule of the Geneva talks and even more so following the fall of the Laval government, which gave new hope and renewed vigor to those who sought to extend the sanctions and to exploit every possible avenue to that end, not least those offered by the outrage of broad sectors of international public opinion over the methods of warfare employed by the Italians in Africa (the use of asphyxiating gases, indiscriminate and retaliatory bombings) and over certain specific incidents (generally more unintentional than deliberately planned), such as the bombing of some Ethiopian field hospitals, where, moreover, European or Arab doctors and staff were working.

Nor, within this overall picture of the situation in the immediate aftermath of the failure of the Laval-Hoare plan, can one underestimate (though they certainly should not be exaggerated) the concerns that must have arisen in Mussolini regarding certain signs of apathy and discouragement that were spreading—following the initial enthusiasm over De Bono's early successes— across the country due to the stalemate in military operations and the evolution of the international context.

In this situation, the early months of 1936—after an initial period of discouragement, uncertainty about what to do, and second-guessing of past actions—were characterized essentially by a series of more or less haphazard and "resentful-propagandistic" initiatives (such as the publication, personally ordered by Mussolini, of the "Maffey Report") but also by a two-pronged, systematic diplomatic effort, the first directed toward Paris, the second toward Berlin.

The most serious and demanding effort was directed toward Paris; indeed, while France had always been the cornerstone of Mussolini's Ethiopian policy, it became so even more so in the second half of January 1936, when Laval's government was succeeded by that of Sarraut, with Flandin at the Quai d'Orsay.

With international public opinion increasingly hostile toward Italy and fascism—even though it was predominantly pacifist (in the sense of opposing the idea of expanding the conflict)—and gradually more receptive to the slogans and press campaigns of the anti-fascist and left-wing parties, and with a markedly anti-Italian stance among a whole group of small states present in Geneva, with a British government that was unable to chart a clear course (except at the level of military leaders who, concerned about the inadequacy and technical backwardness of their own preparations in the Mediterranean, launched in 1936 a vast and systematic plan to transform and strengthen the British defense system in this vital sector for England) and, in practice, at the mercy of Eden's politics (though, often, it would be better to say his mood swings)—and, in this context, with the sword of Damocles

hanging over their heads in the form of the extension of sanctions, which, following the setback in December, had once again become the subject of insistent discussion and practical planning within the League of Nations; in this dramatic context, as we were saying, the French card—Laval or no Laval—was, for Mussolini and Palazzo Chigi, the only certainty, the only lifeline.

Hence their intense efforts to hold on to France by any means necessary, with assurances of their willingness to keep the Italian-French friendship and the "Stresa Front" alive and not to further weaken the League of Nations, with promises to be, if necessary, more European than the British were willing to be, but also with threats to do the exact opposite if forced by an excessive rapprochement between Paris and London and, above all, by a French acceptance of the extension of sanctions.

In the last ten days of February, this stance became downright ultimatum-like. Faced with the increasingly real possibility that in Geneva the issue of sanctions would shift from technical talks to a political debate over their extension, Cerruti in Paris and Aloisi, Suvich, and Mussolini himself in Rome did not mince words: if the French government allowed the extension of sanctions, Franco-Italian friendship would immediately suffer the repercussions—and, first and foremost, precisely on the point that mattered most to the French: the Gamelin-Badoglio and Denain-Valle agreements, in other words, regarding Germany.

On February 27, in a meeting with Ambassador De Chambrun, Mussolini was particularly explicit:

We have reached a point where we must assume our responsibilities and set the record straight. I am no less outraged than all Italians by the already severe sanctions that have been imposed on my country; yet I have not altered my political course in Europe because of this. Far from it—I remain, as you can tell Mr. Flandin, firmly committed to the Stresa line… I can assure you that, to this day, there is absolutely nothing in the political sphere standing between Germany and me. My view of Germany remains exactly what it was last April. But given the months that have passed and the developments in this crisis, any tightening of sanctions will inevitably plunge Italy back into isolation, from which its government will have the imperative duty to extricate it. It is up to France and England not to turn us away.

There are currently plans to tighten the sanctions once again. This will be followed by talk of yet another round of tightening. All of this can only lead to war, and we must not delude ourselves about the effectiveness of measures which, as they are intensified, move ever further in the opposite direction of their intended purpose, for they do nothing but harden the Italian nation's resistance and strengthen its moral unity.

I know for certain that in the United States, as well as in England and France, people are beginning to realize that we have gone too far down this path and that the time has come to stop. The danger in this regard ultimately lies not in Paris or London, but in Geneva itself, where small, irresponsible nations—whose interests are not directly at stake—mistakenly imagine they are defending their own future security by hastening, under the current circumstances, the progress of the machinery that has been set in motion. Could France, whose authority is decisive, not use its influence to enlighten them and allay

their fears?

I must state unequivocally that, if the Geneva meeting on March 2 results in a tightening of the sanctions already in force, Italy is determined to react; it will respond, first and foremost, by refusing to sign any naval agreement, by withdrawing from the League of Nations, and by denouncing the arrangements made, on the one hand, between General Gamelin and Marshal Badoglio, and, on the other hand, between General Denain and General Valle.

Faced with such a hardline stance, the French government initially sought to play a moderating role (especially with London) while at the same time taking refuge behind the argument that any extension of sanctions would have no practical effect, given that the U.S. would not participate in an embargo against Italy—so much so that, after some hesitation, the U.S. had limited itself to reiterating its previous position.

Later, Paris's stance became even more decisive and proactive. This was certainly influenced by the desire to avoid a further deterioration of relations with Rome, especially at a time when concerns were growing over Hitler's policies and London's ambiguous attitude toward them.

However, the influence of another factor should not be overlooked. In Africa, by the end of February, military operations had by then taken a turn entirely favorable to the Italians. Nevertheless, Mussolini, speaking with De Chambrun, had stated that if Italy were given sufficient concessions and Geneva adopted a more reasonable stance toward Italy, he was ready to bring the Ethiopian campaign to a close without imposing a diktat on the Negus.

And as an indirect—yet at the same time public—confirmation of this statement, on March 1, *Il Popolo d'Italia* published an editorial (which De Chambrun attributed to Mussolini personally) stating that with the conquest of Amba Alagi, the old scores between Italy and Ethiopia had now been settled both militarily and morally.

Nor can it be entirely ruled out that in Paris they had realized that, despite the failure of the Laval-Hoare plan, Rome had always continued to consider a negotiated solution to the conflict and, more importantly, had been to some extent informed of some of the various attempts being made by the Italians in those very days—especially in Djibouti and Athens—to put these intentions into practice by making contact with figures in the Negus's entourage.

In light of all these factors—and, furthermore, the fear that Mussolini might strike a deal with Hitler—it is understandable why, in the very first days of March, on the eve of the possible decision in Geneva to extend the sanctions, the French stance became, as mentioned, more clearly and actively pro-Italian, to the point that Paris effectively made its potential support for the sanctions decision contingent on a specific British commitment to back it should Germany seek to take advantage of the situation; and—since Britain obviously failed to make such a commitment—in Geneva, Paris had the discussion on the proposal to further tighten the sanctions postponed and, in its place, secured approval for the dispatch to Rome and Addis-Ababa to seek a new basis for reconciliation.

For Mussolini, this was certainly no small success, even though—just as certainly—the French move did not in any way eliminate the danger posed by the sanctions and exposed him to the risk of having to relinquish at the negotiating table a more or less substantial portion of what he had secured on the battlefield in recent weeks and what he could still have secured in the short term.

Three days after its approval, the invitation proposed by the French was accepted in principle by the Negus; two days later, Italy's acceptance was also announced in Geneva. For the time being, however, the matter came to nothing: on that very same day, in fact, Hitler proceeded with the unilateral remilitarization of the Rhineland; Europe and the League of Nations had far more pressing matters to attend to.

The remilitarization of the Rhineland brings us back to what, as we have said, was Mussolini's second diplomatic line of action during these very first months of 1936: the one directed toward Berlin.

We have already discussed, in this very chapter, the flexible and conciliatory stance that the Duce had adopted in his policy toward Germany since the spring of '35, and we have explained the reasons for it. If we keep in mind what we said in those pages, it is easy to understand how, after the failure of the Laval-Hoare plan, more than one of the Duce's collaborators—including quite a few Fascists—and Mussolini himself began—in some cases for tactical reasons, in others with the intention of bringing about a genuine shift in Fascist policy—to look to Berlin as a way to somehow extricate Italy from the stalemate and the difficulties in which it found itself.

At the diplomatic level, the person who perhaps pushed hardest in this direction was Attolico, the ambassador to Berlin. As early as November–December, he had advocated seeking German support. In January, his insistence grew stronger, going so far as to send Ciano a copy of a confidential report drafted for Palazzo Chigi in which—albeit for tactical reasons, that is, to alarm the Anglo-French, create difficulties for them, and make them more pliable—it suggested persevering in the moderate rapprochement with Berlin that had begun in the previous months and had become more explicit precisely in that January, to the point of being noticed and causing concern in many foreign ministries, especially in Paris.

In reality, Italian-German relations had been quite opaque up to that point, and today—based on German documentation—we can affirm that, on the German side, they had been downright ambiguous, if not hostile.

No matter how one looks at it, Hitler's interest lay in ensuring that the war in Ethiopia would be long and difficult for Mussolini and that it would drive an unbridgeable wedge between Italy and the other major Western powers.

By working behind the scenes toward this end, Hitler could in fact achieve several positive outcomes:

a) promote Italy's international isolation and, consequently, create a need for Mussolini to escape it by drawing closer to him;

b) deprive France and England of Italy's friendship or alliance;

c) weaken Italy economically and militarily;

d) take advantage of Italy's commitment in Africa and its economic straits to undermine some of its positions in Austria and Hungary and attempt to take its place economically in the Balkan Peninsula.

Finally, it cannot be ruled out that among the Nazis' aims was also that of exerting some degree of ideological hegemony over Italy, by taking advantage of (and fomenting) the spread in many fascist circles of the conviction that the anti--Italian and anti-fascist stance of vast sectors of international public opinion regarding the war, as well as the hostility of a number of politicians and government officials, were the result of a conspiracy orchestrated by international Freemasonry and Bolshevism.

Given these circumstances, the German government—which, above all, also had to take into account the sentiments, if not of its own public, then at least of the party leadership (especially at the middle- and lower-levels, which were far from favorable toward Italy, particularly due to the still-vivid echoes of the controversies of 1934) — although it had declared its condemnation of policies aimed at overthrowing fascism, it certainly did not make a serious effort to help and support the Italian economy, which was struggling due to sanctions, and—behind the scenes—had preferred to take advantage of the opportunity to undermine Italy's positions in Central and Southeastern Europe.

As for arms, a law of November 6, 1935, formally established a ban on exports to both Italy and Ethiopia. We say "formally" because we now know that, in reality, in the months immediately preceding the war in Africa, Germany secretly supplied Ethiopia (via Belgium and Norway) with weapons and ammunition worth 1,200,000 marks, and some shipments even took place after hostilities had begun.

In addition to the law of November 6, another was enacted ten days later, establishing a general ban on the export of foodstuffs and raw materials without state authorization. The official justification—partly true but partly for convenience—was to prevent other countries from hoarding these goods. Trade between Germany and Italy in connection with the war thus saw a significant increase, though not an exceptionally large one—certainly not to the extent that some in Italy had hoped—and, a fact not without significance, the German side took care to derive the greatest economic benefit and to favor the clearing balance in its own favor.

Thus, Funke is not wrong when he wrote:

In reality, Italy did not receive material support from Germany that could be seen as evidence of a friendly political bond between the two totalitarian regimes.

Nevertheless, in order to break out of its isolation to some extent—and even more so to secure a means of exerting pressure and making threats against France—Mussolini launched a policy of rapprochement with Germany in January 1936. He personally took the most significant step during the well-known audience granted on January 6 to Ambassador von Hassell. This was followed by other steps at various levels. Almost simultaneously, the Italian press began to shift its tone toward Germany, expressing some significant praise.

This new stance immediately drew the attention of various foreign ministries—particularly the French one—raising doubts and concerns, as well as, in some cases, explicit requests for clarification.

Among those who sought clarification, the French were at the forefront. After several discussions with Suvich and Aloisi, De Chambrun addressed the issue directly with Mussolini on February 27, receiving from him—as we have seen—the most explicit assurances that nothing had changed in his policy toward Berlin and that nothing would change unless the Geneva powers forced him to do so.

French diplomatic documents show that, in principle, Paris was inclined to give credence to the Italian assurances. Of course, this did not prevent doubts, uncertainties, and concerns from continuing to persist, but this was precisely what Mussolini and Palazzo Chigi wanted.

Suvich, in particular, was adamant about not going beyond certain public stances and a few entirely momentary and tactical "waltz turns"; for him, Germany was the greatest danger to Italy, Austria the keystone of the European system, and the restoration of Anglo-French-Italian friendship—along with the recovery of Italy's now-traditional autonomy in foreign policy and its "decisive influence"—the primary objective to be achieved as soon as possible.

His notes to Mussolini are explicit. In one dated February 7, devoted to Austria, Suvich elaborated on these concepts.

"Sacrificing Austria would, in my view, be a colossal mistake." Aside from moral considerations, "the day Austria is annexed by Germany and Germany reaches the Brenner Pass and the Julian Alps, on that day our path will be clearly marked because we will be bound by solidarity with the anti-German bloc against the German threat."

As can be seen, Suvich did not even consider the possibility of an agreement with Berlin.

"It would be a dangerous illusion to believe that Germany, having reached the Brenner Pass and Tarvisio, would stop at these positions without seeking to go beyond them… One would have to disregard German history and ignore the mentality of the German people to think that Germany would not make every effort to cross the hundred kilometers that would then separate it from the Adriatic." On the other hand, "no agreement will be of any use or will be upheld in the face of the drive for German expansion."

And if we move from the Austrian question and the general problem of assessing Germany's natural policy to an interpretation of the significance of that particular moment in Italian foreign policy, the discussion becomes, for us, even more illuminating.

In another of his notes to the Duce, dated January 29, we read:

A conviction is spreading among the Italian public that Italian policy is about to change, abandoning the program of an alliance with the Western Powers to side with Germany. This possibility is not even viewed unfavorably by a segment of the Italian public, which sees in this development a source of satisfaction for the resentment and indignation that the policy of sanctions has provoked in the country.

This widespread impression is naturally also felt abroad and is causing some concern, particularly in France and Austria.

In recent days, I have had the opportunity to discuss the Italian-German rapprochement with nearly all the foreign representatives who have come to visit me at Palazzo Chigi and who have explicitly requested it.

I have consistently replied that this rapprochement is purely psychological in nature, with no underlying secret agreements or preparations for agreements.

I explained this shift in public sentiment as a natural reaction to the fact that Germany, due to its independent status, is outside the sanctions regime.

My statements convinced some and left others somewhat skeptical.

Since the French Ambassador has made some more specific remarks to me regarding this Italian-German rapprochement, I believe it is appropriate to offer a few observations on the matter: A substantive policy of rapprochement with Germany, leading to political-military agreements, does not seem feasible at this time; Germany currently shows no desire to abandon strict neutrality; it may issue some declaration of solidarity between the two regimes (which is the least it can do under the present circumstances), but does not seem willing to go any further. Therefore, we must examine the policy of a rapprochement with Germany in terms of the moral effects it may have and, above all, the impact it may have on the attitude of the other Powers.

Insofar as we wish to give the impression of an improvement in the atmosphere between Italy and Germany, in line with the statements I made to the foreign representatives mentioned above, there is nothing to object to.

The situation is different, however, when it comes to the potential consequences of our political stance if we were to give the impression that we are maneuvering toward an Italian-German alliance in opposition to Geneva and the Western Powers.

I would rule out the possibility that, at this moment, such a move could alarm France and England to the point of granting us greater advantages in a potential negotiated settlement of the Italian-Ethiopian conflict; it is far more likely, however, that if the two aforementioned Powers were to lose hope of our future cooperation within the system of European peace and security, they would be led to exacerbate our situation in order to weaken us to the greatest extent possible and to sideline us for years to come.

A policy of rapprochement with Germany—beyond the limits indicated above—would not provide us with any immediate assistance from Germany, which cannot and will not give it to us, and would cause us to lose the effective aid that, at the appropriate time, could be effectively provided to us by other countries that have an interest in resolving the current situation weighing on everyone and in keeping Italy viable for the future.

Germany's interest in pitting the Stresa Powers against one another is evident, but we—while maintaining our independence for the future—have no interest in falling into Germany's trap.

Equally unfavorable, in my view, would be the impression that a pro-German Italian policy would create in Austria; the reaction could be twofold: the idea that Italy is abandoning Austria would either hand Austria over to the Nazis or throw it into the arms of the France–Little Entente axis; in either case, we would be left out in the cold.

We must not forget that, despite some hostility toward us—which is insurmountable in certain parts of Austria—Austrian social policy has been and remains the most loyal and courageous toward Italy.

Finally, there is another consideration: that, after the end of our campaign in Ethiopia, we will in all likelihood need foreign capital for internal financial consolidation and for the development of the territories we are set to acquire in Ethiopia. A close alliance with Germany would isolate us from major international financial flows and make such an operation more difficult for us.

In conclusion, however painful the current situation may be—(Geneva and relations with the Western Powers)—it is advisable not to burn our bridges with that system, at least until we are absolutely certain that we can go it alone, despite the hostility of others, all the way to the end.

Appropriate instructions should also be given to the Italian press, which tends to go beyond what is necessary to ease tensions.

Nor, based on the available documentation, is there any reason to believe that Mussolini did not share Suvich's approach and overall vision regarding Italian-German relations, even though, given the difficulties of the moment, he was more flexible than Suvich on a tactical level—that is, more willing to make verbal concessions in the hope of avoiding actual concessions to the Germans once the overall situation improved.

When the news of the Rhineland's remilitarization broke, many wondered whether Mussolini had been forewarned by Hitler and whether the two were in agreement. In reality, Mussolini was informed of the German initiative by von Hassell on the morning of March 7, just like the other heads of government at the Locarno Conference.

As already mentioned, however, he knew from Attolico and Renzetti that it was in the works, and while, on the one hand, he was concerned about it, on the other, he did not necessarily view it negatively.

In fact, it gave him some breathing room on the Geneva front, put London—and above all Paris—in serious difficulty, and, most importantly, could pave the way for a new course in his relations with France, in the sense of forcing it to commit more deeply to resolving the Ethiopian question and to a rapid and effective revitalization of the "Stresa Front."

As De Chambrun would report to Flandin on March 27, according to Mussolini, the full restoration of Franco-Italian solidarity in the face of the German threat could exert a strong pull on England and induce it to reconsider its policy toward Italy. It is therefore understandable that as early as March 7, Aloisi noted that he considered the German move "favorable to us." And, above all, it explains the course of action Rome adopted.

Hitler had hoped that Italy would repudiate the Locarno Pact. Mussolini, however, was careful not to do so. He adopted a delaying and procrastinating stance. He assured the Germans that he would not participate in measures against them; "as a sanctioned country"—Cerruti declared on March 10 during a meeting of representatives from the Locarno signatory governments—"Italy could not 'commit in advance to any action of any kind, whether military, political, or economic.'"

In subsequent meetings, as it gradually became clear that France and England held opposing positions (the former favoring intransigence, the latter favoring appeasement), the Italian stance became more flexible, to the point that on March 19, Italy joined in condemning Germany, albeit with some reservations.

And while he told the Germans that the "Stresa Front" was dead, he let the French know that, if they lifted the sanctions, they would have his full support, that he would like to revive the "Stresa Front," and above all that he was considering a five-party reincarnation (including Poland) of the "Four-Power Pact." Meanwhile, just to be on the safe side, he hastened to meet with Gombos and Schuschnigg (who were in Rome from March 20 to 24 to reaffirm and strengthen the 1934 agreements).

At Palazzo Chigi, they were well aware that this political line contained an open contradiction, just as they realized that it displeased just about everyone and fueled everyone's suspicions.

At that moment, however, it seemed the most suitable approach to put pressure on France and commit it to taking concrete action to resolve the Ethiopian question—both by definitively blocking plans to extend the sanctions (in France during March and April, the anti-sanctionists regained momentum and grew in number, and on April 14, Laval would advocate for their outright repeal in an interview) and by working to bring the conflict to an end.

Meanwhile, during the days of the Rhine crisis, in Africa—with the Battle of Lake Ashianghi—the war had, in military terms, been practically decided: the Ethiopian army was in disarray, and nothing could prevent Badoglio from advancing directly on Addis Ababa. In this situation, it became a matter of the utmost urgency for Palazzo Chigi to make a decision on how to attempt a political resolution of the conflict, given that it was evident that, while various possibilities existed, one certainly could not ignore what the international reactions would be—in Paris, Geneva, and above all in London—and each of these had to be evaluated also and above all in light of the direction the regime wished to give to its political strategy after the conclusion of the conflict itself.

One of Suvich's customary notes offers us insight into the alternatives that were considered within a very short timeframe.

Given its importance, we reproduce it in its entirety:

Badoglio declares a ceasefire and, on behalf of the government, offers peace negotiations to the Negus.

Reply within X days.

a) The Negus responds affirmatively;

b) The Negus replies that he is willing to negotiate within the framework of the Geneva Convention and in the spirit of the Pact;

c) The Negus replies that he will not negotiate as long as we are on Ethiopian territory, or something to that effect.

In case a), negotiations begin, and we will then determine the next steps.

In case b), the Negus's conditions are not accepted, and his response is considered a refusal.

In case c), the Negus's response is not even taken into consideration.

In cases (b) and (e), all possibilities for agreement are declared exhausted: the Ethiopian dynasty is proclaimed to have fallen; and the Italian dynasty, having taken its place, either annexes all of Abyssinia or subjugates Abyssinia to Italian sovereignty.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of this solution?

Advantages: 1. A comprehensive solution. It definitively brings the Abyssinian issue to a close for us and relieves us of the embarrassment of pressure to seek a compromise.

Disadvantages: Since our move will be viewed as an act of defiance, it will provoke a strong reaction in Geneva and, in particular, in Great Britain. This would neutralize the favorable effect of the cessation of hostilities.

What might happen in Geneva:

1) Non-recognition of our fait accompli.

2) Our expulsion from the League of Nations (Great Britain may insist: either we're out or they're out —expulsion requires unanimity minus the party concerned; abstentions do not count).

3) Tightening of current sanctions.

4) Imposition of new sanctions.

5) A galvanization of the pro-sanctions camp, and a strengthening and broadening of anti-Italian sentiment in Great Britain.

If, on the other hand, a declaration of annexation and Italian sovereignty were not made (even while taking all administrative measures that leave no doubt as to our ultimate intentions), the situation would present the following advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages: There would be no inevitable reaction that an act of defiance such as annexation would provoke. As the de facto situation persists, it would gradually accustom other countries to the de jure solution that would then naturally emerge. There is a possibility that events of such a nature might occur or be provoked in Abyssinia—or that acts of allegiance to Italy might be declared—such that our claim to sovereignty would appear legitimate.

The favorable influence of our declaration of the cessation of hostilities would be fully felt—not excluding the possibility that some states, as a result, might abandon sanctions. A situation of progressive weakening of the League of Nations' position would be created, which might allow us to eventually reach a comprehensive solution without the upheaval that such a solution would cause now.

Disadvantages:

1) Pressure would be exerted on us in Geneva to begin negotiations with the Negus in the spirit of compromise—pressure that we would naturally have to resist.

2) The possibility that further developments in Europe and around the world could make a comprehensive solution more difficult to achieve.

There is no doubt that the first, forceful solution is the most attractive and also the easiest to implement. There does not appear to be a danger that it could lead to war, at least not as an immediate consequence; rather, it may prolong the state of tension and hostility toward Italy, as well as the sanctions (current or future, with their consequences); perhaps the matter should be examined more from the perspective of the country's financial and economic resilience. It is certain, however, that sanctions are not eternal and that, therefore, after some time, a settlement will inevitably have to be found.

Since it has been established that a cessation of hostilities would be proclaimed in any case, the decision regarding the offer of negotiations and the consequences of a negative response can be left pending for a few more days.

Based on this set of considerations, Mussolini made his decision in early April. Given the intransigent position taken by Eden—and shared by numerous smaller governments—it was impossible to envisage resolving the conflict on the basis of the declaration adopted by the League of Nations at the proposal of the French in early March, both for reasons of prestige and because, in Geneva, the military victory achieved on the battlefield would have been transformed into what amounted to a diplomatic defeat that the regime could not accept.

At the same time, rejecting the Geneva invitation to resolve the conflict outright would have been dangerous, since such a decision would have alienated French sympathies toward Italy—sympathies Mussolini could not do without—made a settlement of the dispute difficult, and definitively dashed his plans to achieve a détente with London, and, in the long run, to reach the long-awaited general agreement, which, despite everything, remained the strategic objective of his policy.

On the other hand, the Negus was no longer able to prolong the resistance, unless he resorted to guerrilla warfare and hoped for a suspension of military operations or, at least, a slowdown in them due to the imminent arrival of the heavy rainy season.

Proof of this was that the Ethiopian government had hastened, in March, to accept the invitation from Geneva to seek a basis for reconciliation with Rome, and on April 3 had sent an urgent appeal for help to London.

In this situation, during the first ten days of April, Mussolini decided to attempt a last-minute agreement—essentially outside the framework of the Society—that would balance the regime's military needs with its need for prestige.

With the collaboration of Palazzo Chigi, the Ministry of the Colonies (perhaps the most reluctant to accept a non-totalitarian solution to the conflict), and General Gabba, Badoglio's chief of staff in Africa, he drew up a compromise proposal on the basis of which to initiate negotiations with the Negus and commit Paris to supporting it both in London and, subsequently, in Geneva.

We have learned of this plan from multiple sources. An initial reference can be found in Aloisi's diary, dated April 7. It reads:

Mussolini spoke to me about the Committee of 13 and his intentions regarding peace. 1. He said that we will never abandon the conquered territories for five reasons: a) because their conquest cost us blood and money; b) because we were welcomed as liberators by the local populations; and c) because, if we were to withdraw, we could not leave these populations—who have come to us—exposed to

reprisals; d) because in all the occupied territories we have brought civilization by building roads, hospitals, etc.; e) because abandoning the occupied territories would have serious repercussions on the indigenous populations of Eritrea and Somalia. Therefore, everything that has been conquered must remain.

2. There is no plan to connect Assab to central Ethiopia via a corridor; 3. The rest of unoccupied Ethiopia must be “Iraqified,” as Chambrun put it—that is, it must have a regime similar to those in Morocco or Iraq.

F. Charles-Roux also spoke of this plan; in his capacity as the French representative to the Holy See, he took it upon himself to inform the French government of the Italian proposal and convey it to them, especially since Cardinal Pacelli was actively interested in it. Charles-Roux wrote:

On the afternoon of April 9, Holy Thursday, the Italian ambassador to the Vatican had gone, as was customary, to visit some churches in Rome, when he was joined by one of his secretaries, who had been looking for him for two hours: Mussolini had sent for him urgently. Count Pignatti was received that evening by the Duce, who outlined to him the general terms under which the Negus would conclude peace and instructed him to inform Cardinal Pacelli so that he might relay the news to Paris and London.

Holy Days are not particularly suitable occasions for discussing politics with a prince of the Church, even if he is the Secretary of State… Therefore, Count Pignatti managed to see Cardinal Pacelli early on Saturday morning, because on that day the Secretary of State had me asked to stop by his office around noon.

The moment, he told me, was regarded by the Italians as “decisive.” What concerned them was no longer the course of operations in Abyssinia, but the settlement of the Abyssinian question itself. Their firm resolve was to settle the matter through a direct agreement between themselves and the Negus, without allowing the League of Nations to step in and resolve it on their behalf.

Any attempts, whether in Geneva or London, to take the matter into their own hands would therefore have risked further straining the international situation, which was already too tense. But Mussolini had asked the Holy See to communicate his terms of peace with Abyssinia to France and England in advance: they would be conveyed to me the following day.

The next day, which was Easter Sunday, Cardinal Pacelli received me after the high Mass he had celebrated pontifically at St. Peter's. When I arrived for my appointment with him, I saw him enter his office wearing the cape magna, clad in red moiré and ermine; it was the only time he spoke with me in this imposing regalia.

The peace terms he read to me still distinguished three zones within the territory of the Ethiopian Empire; however, Italy's rights in each were granted much more generously. The annexed zone was more extensive. The Negus would be under complete tutelage in the peripheral zone and under control in the central zone as well. There was no longer any question of an international mandate.

This communication was conveyed to me merely as a matter of information, without any recommendation. Cardinal Pacelli was the first to observe that these terms differed greatly from the Italian positions of the previous October and from the Anglo-French offer of October 10, 1935. The difference was explained, moreover, by the fact that Marshal Badoglio's army, gaining ground every day, was now only a few stages away from Addis Ababa.

Finally, a reference can also be found in the writings of A. Lessona—more extensive in *Verso l'Impero*, more concise and elusive in his memoirs. Compared to the previous accounts, this one offers the opportunity to clarify Mussolini's proposal more precisely. Based on this account, the proposal is structured as follows:

1. Territories to be annexed to Eritrea:

a) Tigray, in the broad sense, as far as Lake Ascianghi;

b) Uag, Lasta, Jeggiù, Uollo, and the eastern lowlands, inhabited by the Dancale peoples—who are of the same bloodline as our own—an annexation necessary to form the economic hinterland for Assab and to develop a railway line independent of the Djibouti railway;

c) the Beghemeder, Quarà, and Alefà regions, necessary to secure control of the Tana River.

2. Territories to be annexed to Somalia: Sidama, Borana, Bale Ogaden, and Hararghe—to cut off Kenya's advance toward Ethiopia and deprive the Shia of any hope of access to the sea; Hararghe to establish a territorial link between the colonies and to ensure, in addition to the presumed oil fields, control of the Djibouti railway.

3. Territories under Italian protectorate: Goggiam, to be returned to its original family.

4. All regions along the lower course of the Blue Nile up to Lake Rudolf—including Beni Sciangul,

Uommega, Gimma, Gherar, Limma, and Caffa—to be placed under a Type C mandate.

5. An autonomous kingdom in the Shoa, but disarmed and under our control, with the current ruling family.

Despite the efforts made to support it, however, Mussolini's plan failed completely, because military operations could not be slowed down too much—given the risk that the Negus would take advantage of the delay to reorganize his army, the approaching heavy rainy season, and, above all, because the Ethiopian government refused to accept it, hoping for a last-minute British intervention— and the government in London—dominated by Eden and influenced by the anti-Italian sentiment of its own public opinion and of large sectors of international public opinion—refused to consider it; indeed, saw in it evidence of a non-existent fear that Mussolini was pushing hard for a totalitarian solution and confirmation of the belief, widespread in many circles, that the Italians were incapable of bringing the war to a victorious conclusion by spring.

Hence, in the last ten days of April, Mussolini's decision, on the one hand, to accelerate the military campaign, urging not only Badoglio to march decisively on Addis Ababa but also pressing Graziani to advance northward without delay ("Once Harrar is conquered," he telegraphed him on April 26, Your Excellency will find there the marshal's baton of Italy") and, on the other hand, to make a final, decisive push on Paris to drive a wedge between it and London.

On April 6, in the House of Commons, Eden had stated that the British government would support the extension of sanctions in Geneva. This declaration had worried not only the French—who by then wanted the war to end and realistically realized that, given how far things had gone, there were only two alternatives: either to negotiate or to resort to military measures, a solution which they considered "madness" with which they could not associate themselves, but also Avenol, who—setting aside all other considerations—feared that the situation might ultimately lead to a Franco-Italian agreement that was more or less at odds with another between England and Germany.

Nor, as far as the French were concerned, can one underestimate the fact that at the Quai d'Orsay it had by then become widely believed that Eden lacked a coherent policy and was acting on the basis of contradictory and irreconcilable motivations (such as wanting a return to the "Stresa front" and, at the same time, to do everything possible to irritate Mussolini), and that he reasoned partly out of a desire for prestige (both national and personal), partly under the influence of indignation and embarrassment, and partly under the influence of optimistic and erroneous information and of political and intellectual circles that reduced everything to a fascism-antifascism dichotomy, so that his "policy" faced growing criticism both within the National Majority circles and even within the Foreign Office and the British government, and gave new life to anti-sanctions and openly pro-fascist circles.

Aware of this situation, on April 18, Mussolini summoned De Chambrun and laid his cards on the table.

After stating that, as far as the possibility of a German attack on France was concerned, Paris could rely entirely on Italy's guarantee—since he considered the Gamelin-Badoglio agreements to be fully in force—he said that only an Anglo-Italian conflict could have prevented him from intervening "with all his forces" to defend the Danube line and Austria in particular, in order to counter a German threat ("It is not that my heart compels me," he told him, "for Italy is not well-liked in Austria, but it is my country's vital interest that dictates this stance. The Germans are jealous of any efforts Italy might make to increase its influence in Austria. There is a clash between two dynamic forces, and the Italian dynamic is by no means willing to yield to the German one").

The meaning of this statement was crystal clear. It was now up to the French to draw their own conclusions. And these became apparent in Geneva. Faced with Paris's firm stance, Eden moderated his tone and relented, asking for French assistance in attempting to persuade Mussolini to, in turn, moderate his demands and facilitate a solution that would not deal a "too harsh" blow to the League of Nations.

Despite this apparent goodwill on Eden's part, the last week of April was dramatic in more ways than one: the British press continued its ferocious attacks on Italy, fascism, and Mussolini, fueling a state of overexcitement in public opinion that reawakened Eden's resolve to take a hard line and led him to take no initiative, in the hope that a victory for the Popular Front in the now imminent French elections would give his policy some breathing room.

The result of all this in terms of British public opinion—which, moreover, was driven by a complex state of mind blending frustration at the "great" England's inability to stop "little" Italy, fear of an Italian-German rapprochement, dissatisfaction with the increasingly evident ambiguity and ineptitude of the London government's policy (which, even under Eden—who had shown himself intransigent toward Mussolini—had not lifted a finger against Hitler and made no secret of its desire to find common ground with him, even if that meant a further deterioration of relations with Paris) and a new way of viewing Mussolini and Italy resulting from the spread—driven primarily by certain far-left groups and intellectuals—of a conscious anti-fascism even in circles that, until a few months earlier, had been alien to it or had been influenced by it only superficially—led to a further surge of intransigence, which went so far as to prompt Lord Dawies, a Liberal, and Lord Strabolg, a Labor member, to propose once again in the House of Lords the extension of sanctions and even the closure of the Suez Canal.

In this situation, it is clear that for Mussolini—whether he wanted to or not—there was no choice but to aim for a totalitarian solution, even while trying to escalate the situation as little as possible and, above all, to avoid upsetting the French government too much, especially in anticipation of an imminent change in its leadership.

This was all the more true since Badoglio was now on the verge of entering Addis Ababa (and the capture of the capital was being urged by various governments concerned about the looting and violence to which, in the state of chaos that now reigned there, their subjects and their property were exposed), and any possibility of negotiating with the Ethiopians had vanished, given that the Negus had departed for Djibouti on May 1 (from where he would continue, via Haifa, to Europe on a warship made available to him by the British government), and there was no longer any authority capable of negotiating.

Among the various initiatives that demonstrate Mussolini's desire not to dramatize the political situation, two deserve special mention.

First, the significant toning down of anti-British rhetoric by the regime's press.

Second, the meeting—personally arranged by Mussolini—between Grandi and King Edward VIII of England on April 29, to express his fears that a further deterioration of Italian-British relations could make a return to the traditional friendship between the two countries difficult, if not impossible, in the near future.

To these two initiatives must be added two interviews given by Mussolini during those days.

In the first, given on May 4 to Ward Price of the *Daily Mail* and published by that newspaper two days later and by *Il Popolo d'Italia* on May 8 in an abridged and toned-down version (among other things, one of the passages that caused the most stir abroad was omitted—the one stating that victory in East Africa had placed Italy among the satisfied powers), he dwelled—with a truly exceptional mixture of sincerity, impudence, and boastfulness—on a series of issues that were very close to the heart of the British public and had made a great impression on it.

First and foremost was the issue of the League of Nations.

"Italy," he said, "was, like many other countries, of the opinion that the Geneva-based organization should be reorganized on new foundations and was ready to cooperate toward that end. Despite the sanctions, Italy was also willing—especially after the remilitarization of the Rhineland—to bring about "a frank and concrete rapprochement among the countries of the West, which must finally come to an understanding, because they cannot fight one another, on pain of the collapse of the entire European civilization": Italy wanted peace above all else."

As for relations with England, "I have always been ready, and am and will always be ready, to reaffirm—in whatever manner is deemed most appropriate—that my policy has never intended, nor does it intend, to cause any harm to the interests of the British Empire. Only individuals blinded by bad faith can think otherwise.

Italy has no aspirations whatsoever—not even remotely—toward Egypt, which I consider an independent country, not African but rather Mediterranean, and with which Italy has always maintained and will always maintain excellent relations.

Italy has no political interest in Sudan and none in Palestine. It is therefore false to attribute to Italy any responsibility for the unrest between Arabs and Jews.

I admit that the Italian press has clashed with the British press, but this was inevitable given the attitude adopted by many British circles, which deeply surprised all Italians.

British ambulances were never deliberately bombed by Italian pilots; the missionaries from the various Red Cross organizations were killed or wounded by the Abyssinians, who are too backward to respect such symbols.

As for the gas, Aloisi, in Geneva, spoke very clearly on the subject. Dr. Winkler, of the Dutch Red Cross, treated, out of hundreds of wounded, "only one" who was believed to have been affected by gas.

As for the methods of warfare employed by the Ethiopians, they are always the same and have horrified the world. If the British public were to see the photographs of the massacred workers at the Gondrand construction site, they would finally get a clear idea of the level of cruelty to which the Shoans are capable of descending."

And on the same day, the Japanese daily *Asahi Shinbun* published another interview with Mussolini in which three statements stood out. In the first, he sought to make it clear that—although he could not say anything at the moment about Ethiopia's future constitution—"the legitimate rights of the Powers will be respected to the very last detail." In the second, he stated: "My stance toward England was

necessary for the defense of the Fatherland. If the situation does not change, I would have to continue maintaining that stance. But this is not an unchanging policy. Indeed, I hope that the day will come when it is possible for Italy to reestablish good relations with England. That depends entirely on the British attitude."

And finally, the last one: "No. I do not believe that a new European war will break out in the near future. Italy will never provoke a war in Europe."

On the morning of May 5, Badoglio occupied Addis Ababa. From the standpoint of conventional military operations, Ethiopian resistance had been broken and had practically ceased. At sunset, two hours after sirens throughout Italy had summoned the population to assemble, Mussolini made the announcement from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia to an overflowing crowd (estimated at around two hundred thousand people):

Throughout its thirty centuries of history, Italy has experienced many memorable moments, but today's is certainly one of the most solemn.

I announce to the Italian people and to the world that the war is over.

I announce to the Italian people and to the world that peace has been restored.

It is not without emotion and pride that, after seven months of bitter hostilities, I utter this great word. But it is absolutely necessary for me to add that this is our peace, the Roman peace, which is expressed in this simple, irrevocable, definitive statement: Ethiopia is Italian! Italian, because it is occupied by our victorious armies. Italian by right, because through the sword of Rome, civilization triumphs over barbarism, justice triumphs over cruel tyranny, and the redemption of the wretched triumphs over millennia of slavery…

At the rally on October 2, I solemnly promised that I would do everything possible to prevent an African conflict from escalating into a European war. I have kept that promise, and I am more convinced than ever that to disturb the peace of Europe is to bring about the collapse of Europe.

But I must immediately add that we are ready to defend our resounding victory with the same fearless and unyielding determination with which we won it…

We have reached a milestone on our journey. Let us continue marching in peace toward the tasks that await us tomorrow, which we will face with our courage, our faith, and our resolve…

That very evening, in his diary, Aloisi noted:

A profound speech, carefully crafted, well-structured, yet one that foreshadows his entire program. In fact, complete annexation is now inevitable. With the flight of the Negus and the government, there is no longer any central authority empowered to end the war.

The League of Nations is no longer competent to negotiate, and we must argue that it is incompetent. Naturally, however, we will have to face violent opposition from England and France. Our peace will not be recognized, and sanctions will likely remain in place. But the die is now cast.

Almost at the same time, Marshal Caviglia—who had certainly not been a supporter of the war—had foreseen that it would be long and difficult and had feared that Mussolini would lead Italy to ruin—given that while "in a calm state of mind he reasoned well, saw the essential causes, the available means, the possibilities for organization, the way to overcome obstacles"—and was therefore "adaptable, flexible, and capable of extricating himself from the most difficult situations"—but when his prestige was at stake, he lost his sense of proportion and gave in to the most harmful and dangerous reactions—wrote in his own diary:

His words were skillful, for he showed that he did not wish to disturb the peace. There is no doubt that the credit for the victory belongs to him… Mussolini has reason to be proud of his victory.

By now his position is secure, and nothing can shake it anymore, if… If he does not let his head be carried away by the intoxicating clouds of incense; if he knows how to avoid falling prey to the schemes of England, which will seek revenge; if he does not commit errors of megalomania more serious than those committed so far; if he succeeds in restoring the economic and financial conditions of Italy—reduced to poverty and burdened by taxes that tend to dry up its sources of wealth, since agriculture alone is not enough in Italy to sustain 43 million people. We must not forget that developing Ethiopia will take two or three generations and many billions that we do not have.

These notes, written by two men who were very different from one another—both in their attitudes toward Mussolini, in their ability to understand and assess his intentions, and in the sensibilities that shaped their judgments—summarize, in a certain sense, the underlying motivations, both political and psychological, that—once Addis Ababa had been occupied—led the Duce to set aside his last hopes for an agreement and decide on the outright annexation of Ethiopia, even though it was clear that doing so would make the possibility of improved relations with London even more difficult and remote, and that relations with Paris would also suffer as a result—all the more so since, in those very days, the Popular Front had won the elections and Sarraut was about to be replaced as head of the French government by the leader of the new majority, Léon Blum.

The psychological reasons behind Mussolini's decision are evident.

Even without overestimating the disappointment and resentment he had accumulated over many months toward England and his desire for a spectacular revenge—which must surely have been an important factor in his decision—it is clear that, at that point, failing to simply annex Ethiopia and proclaim Victor Emmanuel III emperor would have given theimpression of fearing the consequences of this act and, moreover, of embarking on negotiations with the League of Nations that not only would have dragged on for who knows how long, but would have turned victorious Italy into a defendant forced to defend its rightful claim—a position Mussolini had rejected seven months earlier, when he had initiated hostilities: a prospect so humiliating that it could not even be considered by Mussolini's prestige.

As for the political reasons, they too are quite clear: with the possibility of bilateral negotiations with the Negus having faded, and unwilling to recognize any right of the League of Nations to intervene in the resolution of the conflict (to the point of considering withdrawing from it if the League had persisted in its intransigent policy) and since it was clear that the British government—both as a matter of principle and to save face to some extent—would negotiate only through Geneva, and, finally, since a reversal of French policy in the immediate future was more than likely, dragging out the decision to annex all of Ethiopia would have been not only useless but counterproductive.

It was therefore far better to act swiftly: to reaffirm both its desire for peace and to rebuild the "Stresa Front," as well as its efforts to negotiate directly with the Negus in every possible way while it was still feasible; but, at the same time, to declare the war over and simply annex all of Ethiopia, leaving every decision to others; at the same time, however, to play for time, so as to take advantage of the confusion and uncertainties of the moment (and it was no coincidence that this was precisely the suggestion Churchill himself made to A. Pirelli on May 7: "The annexation will be hard to swallow in both London and Geneva; but if Mussolini intends to proceed with it, let him do so immediately, while the confusion lasts and before the British government has taken a position") and, to cushion the backlash from the initiative, rely on those countries and sectors of international public opinion that were now primarily inclined to bring the Ethiopian conflict to a close, to resume trade with Italy, and to reintegrate it into the European framework (in some cases to prevent Mussolini from getting too close to Hitler, in others out of fear sparked by the victory of the Popular Front in France and the prospect that this might lead to closer ties between Paris and Moscow).

In light of these considerations, it becomes clear why—after a very brief formal consultation with the Grand Council and the Council of Ministers—in the early hours of the night on May 9, Mussolini

hastened, despite French efforts to dissuade him, to proclaim “after fifteen centuries, the reappearance of the empire on the fateful hills of Rome” and to announce that Victor Emmanuel III was assuming “for himself and his successors” the title of Emperor of Ethiopia.

Having taken this step, the most important issue for Mussolini in truly bringing the Ethiopian question to a close remained that of the sanctions. To think that the League of Nations would formally recognize the empire at that moment was absurd; however, the stance the Geneva-based organization would take regarding the sanctions—whether to repeal or maintain them—was of the utmost importance to the Duce, since his future foreign policy would largely depend on it and, in particular, the possibility of resuming political dialogue with London sooner or later and, if possible, attempting to salvage to some extent that with Paris—or, since the isolation of Italy was unthinkable for him, the need to give tangible substance to the rapprochement of recent months with Berlin.

The diplomatic records concerning relations with Paris, London, and Berlin during the months of May and June are extremely significant in this regard and clearly show how much Mussolini—while displaying the utmost confidence and (for domestic consumption) intransigence—was keen to mend relations with the two Western powers, viewed Germany with suspicion, and considered a full-fledged agreement with it as a last resort.

In anticipation of the Geneva decision (on May 12–13, the League of Nations, after implicitly reaffirming its condemnation of Italy and refusing to recognize the empire, postponed any decision until June 16) Mussolini’s main effort—likely seeking to capitalize on the fact that, at least for the time being, the Sarraut government was still in power—was directed toward reassuring the French public and government about his true intentions.

He sought to influence public opinion primarily by giving a series of interviews marked by a peaceful and conciliatory tone to *Le Matin*, *Le Petit Parisien*, and *L’Intransigeant*, which published them on May 16, 23, and 25, respectively. He worked on the government through a series of direct and indirect contacts with French diplomats, all centered on a twofold theme: his preference for a policy of “open collaboration” between Italy and France, and—should Paris refuse to participate—his need to turn to Germany.

And not without success, given that in the second half of May the Quai d’Orsay worked to persuade the Foreign Office to seriously consider lifting the sanctions and preventing Mussolini from seeking German support; more importantly, it continued to pursue this line in June with the Blum government as well.

Toward the Popular Front government, moreover, Mussolini made every effort—perhaps even more so than toward Sarraut’s government. Of particular importance in this regard were the talks he held on June 1 with B. de Jouvenel and on June 22 with the former Radical-Socialist minister L. Malvy.

To the latter, he said that he would not insist that the League of Nations recognize the empire, but that he would not accept a decision by the League that categorically ruled out such recognition in the future; he also reaffirmed his willingness—once the issue of sanctions was resolved—to cooperate closely with France.

“The current situation,” he told him, “compels me to seek elsewhere the assurances I have lost from France and from England, in order to reestablish the disrupted balance to my advantage.

To whom should I turn, if not to Hitler? I must tell you that I have already received overtures from him. Germany's conduct toward Italy, moreover, has been perfectly correct and understanding throughout the entire Ethiopian crisis.

So far, I have held back. I fully understand what will happen if I come to an understanding with Hitler. First of all, there will be the Anschluss in the near future.

Then, following the Anschluss, it will be Czechoslovakia, Poland, the German colonies, and so on. To put it plainly, war is inevitable.

That is why I have hesitated—and still hesitate—to commit to this course of action. I asked you to come see me so that you might inform your government of the situation I have outlined to you. I will wait a little longer. But if, in the near future, the French government's attitude toward me, the Fascist regime, and Italy does not change and does not provide me with the assurances I need, then I will accept Hitler's proposals. Italy will become Germany's ally."

With De Jouvenel, however, Mussolini had to go much further.

Here is how a "highly confidential" note by the deputy director for political affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, R. Massigli, summarized the terms of the conversation a few days later:

Mr. Mussolini remains convinced, in principle, that a Franco-Italian agreement is the best policy for Italy. He realizes that any agreement with Germany will be precarious: "Germany can guarantee me against the Anschluss for five years; but what will happen afterward?" If Italy opposes an Anschluss initiative, it will come into conflict with Yugoslavia, whose hostility can be neutralized only through an understanding with France.

But are there any prospects for an entente with France? The Italian head of government believes that the new French government is composed of men who are his adversaries. Moreover, he doubts French strength under the current circumstances. The recent factory occupations, in particular, have made a deep impression on him. In short, the prospects for an attempt at an entente with France seem to him to be rather discouraging.

Under these circumstances, Mr. de Jouvenel is of the opinion that, albeit without enthusiasm, Mr. Mussolini is gradually being drawn toward the idea of an agreement with Germany. Some of his associates are pushing him in that direction—for example, Mr. Rossoni, who speaks in glowing terms about the results achieved by Hitlerism.

Mr. de Jouvenel therefore did not obtain any clarification in Rome regarding the status of the talks [with Germany] that may have begun… When asked what evidence he could provide of his willingness to cooperate in a collective security system, Mr. Mussolini—after affirming his desire for peace in

terms reminiscent of those used by Chancellor Hitler—reportedly said that, if the sanctions were lifted, he would be ready to enter into mutual assistance agreements in Europe that would impose heavy responsibilities on the great powers and, on the other hand, entail arbitration commitments; The question of a Mediterranean pact was not explicitly addressed. But the sanctions exasperate the Italian head of government, even though he claims they do not trouble him. Instead, Mr. Mussolini reportedly said that if the League of Nations were to adopt, with regard to Ethiopia, a resolution similar to the one it adopted for Manchukuo, he would be indifferent to it.

Finally, Mr. de Jouvenel reports that, when asked whether Italy would leave the League of Nations if the sanctions were not lifted in Geneva, Mr. Mussolini replied that he might not wait for that moment if the French government's [policy] ministerial statement contained phrases about Italy that he might take offense at.

However, if we are to give credence to what De Jouvenel stated two years later, in March 1938, at the second congress of the Parti populaire français and in an interview widely reported by the French press, Mussolini was reportedly much more explicit, going so far as to instruct his interlocutor to let Blum know that he was willing to explicitly reaffirm the previous year's agreements with Laval and, ultimately, even to expand their scope:

Tell Blum that I want to negotiate with France, regardless of its internal regime…

Germany, which has reoccupied the Rhineland, is holding you back on the other side of the Rhine bridges with the help of fortifications. You, the French, will no longer be able to do anything. The day that Austria and Czechoslovakia are threatened in their integrity and independence, Your role in Central Europe will therefore be rendered impossible… To reach your protégés or your allies, there remains only one route: Piedmont and, consequently, Italy. Well then! If France agrees to recognize Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, Italy is ready to let you pass, to let your troops pass, and to stand by your side the day Austria's independence is threatened… With you, I will defend Czechoslovakia; with me, you will defend Austria. There is no other way to halt the conquest of Central Europe… Tell that to Blum.

It is obviously impossible to pass precise judgment on the authenticity of this second account of the conversation with De Jouvenel (which, incidentally, was not denied by Massigli). Two considerations, however, would justify not ruling it out: the choice of the person to use for the overture—a journalist rather than a politician or diplomat—which was typical of Mussolini's modus operandi and allowed him to conduct a completely informal and politically non-binding probe that could therefore be taken

up or dropped, but which did not entail an official response and, thus, the risk of a blow to his prestige, especially since it was directed at a declared opponent of fascism; and the fact that, formally, the Gamelin-Badoglio and Denain-Valle agreements were never denounced throughout the entire period of the Popular Front.

Nor, finally, should one underestimate the fact that, as has been noted, despite its programmatically anti-fascist nature, the Blum government's stance on the issue of sanctions remained essentially the same as that of its predecessor—namely, in favor of their revocation.

Toward England, Mussolini took action not very different—except in timing—from that undertaken toward France. While he acted immediately with regard to Paris and continued to do so consistently until the League of Nations decided to repeal the sanctions, his efforts toward London were essentially concentrated in the last days of May, when it became clear that—despite French pressure and the first signs of disarray within the Geneva sanctions front (Chile's proposal to revoke the sanctions, the willingness of Poland and Haiti to follow suit, the increasing number of cases of sanctions violations by numerous countries, and discontent toward the League of Nations on the part of Argentina and other Latin American governments, etc.), Eden tended not to take any initiative, to postpone any decision until September, and, in the meantime, to proceed with negotiations for the establishment of a "Mediterranean Pact"—which, while drawing on an old proposal that had been circulating for years in European chancelleries, clearly aimed—by leveraging the system of agreements and guarantees with the smaller coastal powers that Britain had established in the preceding months for anti-Italian purposes—to contain Italy and thwart Mussolini's plans to reach a direct and comprehensive agreement with London.

In this situation, and in anticipation of an upcoming decision by the British government regarding the position to be taken in Geneva on June 16, during the last week of May Mussolini decided to launch an attack on Eden's policy, convinced that while it had a good chance of being adopted by the British government, there were still many ways it could be undermined, given that within the governing majority, the number of those who believed it would be better to put an end to the tense phase in relations with Italy was growing day by day; a large part of the City's business circles and many military leaders shared this view; and even at the level of public opinion, a softening of the hostility toward Italy—which had characterized the previous weeks and given Eden breathing room—seemed to be taking shape.

On May 26, Grandi paid a second visit to Edward VIII to confirm Mussolini's desire to improve relations between the two countries. The following day, Grandi himself made a similar statement to Eden.

Finally, on May 28—the very day the British government was scheduled to meet to discuss the situation—the *Daily Telegraph* published a lengthy interview with the Duce aimed at reassuring the British in every possible way and countering, without explicitly naming them, the main arguments of Eden and those who favored continuing the hardline policy.

In it, Mussolini—after repeating the statement he had already made to the *Daily Mail* some twenty days earlier that "the end of sanctions will mark Italy's entry into the ranks of the satisfied powers"— —focused primarily on six points, which were precisely those that most troubled the conservative ruling class and that segment of British public opinion that did not judge Anglo-Italian relations solely and exclusively on the basis of anti-fascist sentiment:

1. The small Mediterranean powers had absolutely nothing to fear from Italy; with some of them—Greece and Turkey—Italy had treaties and intended to honor them;

2. Similarly, Italy had no designs on Albania; its sole objective was to “maintain and respect the independence of this small state”;

3. “As long as the sanctions remained in effect, Italy would take no initiative regarding a Mediterranean agreement; however, once the sanctions are lifted, we will examine these issues with the desire to reach an understanding and in a spirit of cooperation and peace”;

4. The troops in Libya would be recalled home as soon as the Home Fleet was withdrawn from the Mediterranean;

5. An Anglo-Italian rapprochement was not only desirable but necessary: “For my part, I will do everything in my power to bring it about”;

6. The end of sanctions (on which Mussolini implied Italy’s continued membership in Geneva depended, whereas—once the issue was resolved—Rome would have no objection to the League of Nations, especially if it were reformed, as others were now hoping) would bring about a general improvement in the European situation and open up favorable prospects “for stabilization and cooperation in Europe.”

In a situation as difficult and precariously balanced as that of Britain—and thanks also to the skill with which Grandi, in the days that followed, managed to win over a number of newspapers and advocate the Italian position in the most appropriate circles (nor can one underestimate the influence, albeit only incidental, of certain street demonstrations organized in London by the Anti-Sanctions League and Mosley’s movement)— the results of these three moves were—in substance, if not in timing—what had been expected in Rome.

In just over ten days, even the British domestic pro-sanctions front began to creak and, within the Conservative majority, actually began to crumble. Perhaps the hardest blows to the hardline positions came from the speech in which (unexpectedly, since in other circumstances—such as during the Laval-Hoare plan—he had supported Eden) N. Chamberlain, on June 10, spoke in favor of lifting the sanctions and of Hoare’s return to the government as First Lord of the Admiralty.

Faced with this new situation, Eden managed to maneuver so that the League of Nations approved the postponement of the debate scheduled for June 16 to June 30, but, on June 18 in the House of Commons, while affirming that troop levels in the Mediterranean would not be reduced and that the agreements concluded with the coastal states would remain in force, he could not help but declare that the British government would recommend to the League of Nations the repeal of the sanctions.

From one perspective, this decision by the London government constituted a resounding success for Mussolini; in practice, it gave him the assurance that the battle with Geneva over the sanctions had now been won. From another perspective, Eden’s stance—and, above all, the fact that, unlike Hoare six months earlier, his defeat had not resulted in his ouster from the Foreign Office—made this success more of a formal, prestige-based victory than a substantive one: Politically, Eden’s statement of June 18 and the League of Nations’ decision the following month resolved the Ethiopian question only very partially as far as Anglo-Italian relations were concerned (especially from the standpoint of British recognition of the empire), they gave good reason to anticipate a more or less prolonged period of

strained relations between Rome and London (made even more difficult by the inability to rely on Paris's good offices or, at least, on realistic French action to hasten and facilitate an improvement in relations) and, therefore, made it—at least in the short term and probably also in the medium term—unthinkable to initiate negotiations for the much-hoped-for general agreement.

Finally, one cannot underestimate another factor: the disappointment and the very negative impression (along with the fear that Eden might seek to take advantage of the situation to turn it to his own benefit) that the postponement of the Geneva meeting—already scheduled for June 16—caused in Rome.

If this aspect of the problem is not kept firmly in mind, there is a risk of misinterpreting the true significance of the relations that existed between Rome and Berlin during this same period.

As the war in Ethiopia drew to a close, concerns about a new, imminent German attempt to annex Austria circulated persistently in European chancelleries. Compared to what was happening in other capitals, these concerns at Palazzo Chigi were much less pronounced. Nevertheless, Mussolini was, on the whole, quite concerned about Austria's fate—so much so that on May 13 he told Aloisi that Italy was on the path "to completely lose Austria."

This conviction of his, combined with the belief that—regardless of how they might develop in the future—relations with England would be strained for a certain period, explains why, between May and July, obsessed as he was with the idea of remaining isolated, he sought to prop up, at least temporarily, Schuschnigg's regime and to secure Hitler's friendship. Decisive in this regard was the lengthy meeting Mussolini held with Schuschnigg at the Rocca delle Camminate on June 5. On this occasion, since the chancellor had been forced to put on a brave face and declare himself convinced of the need to restore Austria's "natural friendship" with the German Reich, the Duce—while confirming Italy's interest in Austria's absolute independence—agreed with him, thereby giving the green light to what would become the Austro-German Treaty of July 11, under which Germany recognized Austria's full sovereignty and pledged not to interfere in the internal affairs of the neighboring republic, obtaining in exchange a commitment that Vienna (while remaining faithful to the protocols with Italy and Hungary of March '34 and March '36) would adapt its policy to the fact that it was a German state, would reinstate the National Socialists within the legal framework and include them in the government, grant them an amnesty, and allow certain German newspapers to enter the country.

It is difficult to imagine that, by giving the green light to the Austro-German rapprochement, Mussolini deluded himself into thinking he could save Austrian independence.

As he had told De Jouvenel a few days earlier, at best he hoped to gain a few years' time in this way—and, we might add, to block a still-possible Anglo-German rapprochement, and furthermore, to succeed in the meantime in reestablishing good relations with London and, if possible, with Paris, so as to be able to oppose the Anschluss at the opportune moment.

At the time, there is no doubt that, by doing so, he certainly secured some breathing room, avoided isolation, and increased his hopes of raising his standing among that segment of the British ruling class that viewed British policy primarily through the lens of safeguarding the continental balance of power and preventing an Italian-German agreement; but, whether intentionally or not, he ended up aligning himself with Hitler; and this for two reasons: because the latter—especially after the victory in Ethiopia had made a great impression in Germany and caused a significant rise in Italian and Fascist stocks—was willing to offer him golden bridges just to bind him to himself (typical in this regard is the statement von Hassell made to Ciano on June 29 that "the Führer had instructed him to make it known

that, when the matter of recognition [of the empire] is deemed ripe, he will be willing to give it favorable consideration without hesitation and without asking for anything in return"); and because Mussolini, while on the one hand he could hope to increase his standing in certain British circles, on the other hand, he was simultaneously increasing the mistrust and hostility toward him harbored by other British and non-British circles and—whether he intended it or not is beside the point—he was shaping his foreign policy in an increasingly ideological manner, stripping it of that realistic tone or appearance that had until then earned it the positive regard (if not outright appreciation) of many; Furthermore, in doing so, he ended up emboldening those—and by then they were no longer a small number—within the regime who viewed the "German solution" with ever-increasing sympathy, since they saw in it, in part, a response to British and international misunderstanding of the Ethiopian campaign, and, in part, a means to revitalize and reinvigorate the Fascist revolution.

It was in this climate that, in early June, the League of Nations meeting finally took place, at which the issue of sanctions was to be discussed. Although the meeting got off to a bad start for the regime (since the Negus's presence provoked an unplanned and uncivil uproar staged by a group of Fascist journalists —apparently at Ciano's irresponsible suggestion—which sparked a wave of indignation and protests), it ultimately proceeded in the best possible way for the regime.

On July 6–7, in fact, the Geneva assembly decided to lift the sanctions, effective July 15.

This decision was followed on July 9 by the British government's decision to withdraw the Home Fleet from the Mediterranean.

Only with these two decisions could the war in Ethiopia be said to have definitively ended at the international level. It was no coincidence that Mussolini chose to comment on and welcome them in an interview granted to the Hearst Group newspapers (reprinted by much of the international press on July 16–17), which, on the whole—given the circumstances—was fairly measured in tone, highlighting in a positive light some of the statements he had already made to the *Daily Telegraph*, and with a brief speech delivered from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia on the evening of July 15, which was far more jubilant and categorical:

Today, July 15 of the fourteenth year, the white flag is being raised on the ramparts of global sanctions.

It is not merely a sign of surrender, but we hope it will be a sign of a return to common sense.

The credit for this great victory on the economic front goes entirely and wholly to the Italian people (the crowd shouted: "To you, Duce!"); it goes to the men, to the women, and to the children of all Italy.

No one wavered, no one gave in: all were ready for any sacrifice, while cherishing in their hearts the certainty that, in the end, civilization and justice would triumph in Africa and Europe.

So it has come to pass; so, under the symbols of the invincible Lictor’s Staff, it will come to pass tomorrow and forever.

7. The Founder of the Empire.

The victory in Ethiopia, the proclamation of the empire, and the recognition of the fait accompli implied by the lifting of sanctions were greeted in Italy with an enthusiasm that often reached the heights of exaltation.

Never had the Duce’s prestige been so high, nor would it ever be again in the years that followed—except, perhaps, during the days of the Munich Conference in late September 1938; but then the context would have been entirely different, and the motivation would have been the illusion that Mussolini had saved the peace of Europe. In the spring and summer of 1936, the Duce’s prestige was rooted in a completely different state of mind, which five years later Mussolini—with a mixture of satisfaction, sadness, and sufficient simplifying rhetoric, yet at the same time not far from the truth—would summarize as follows in *Parlo con Bruno*:

From October 2, 1935, to May 9, 1936, Italy experienced one of the most dramatic, intense, and glorious periods in its history. Those eight months still resonate in many hearts as a lived epic. Everything was resolute, decisive, virile, and popular; and everything, viewed from a distance, seems romantic—so great was the strength, the poetry, and the splendor revealed in the Italian spirit. Never was a war felt more deeply than that one. Never was enthusiasm more sincere. Never was the unity of spirit more profound. A war fought four and six thousand kilometers away; a numerous and cruel enemy; an unexplored world; a hostile League of Nations; the British fleet in the Mediterranean; sanctions; and, on October 3, the crossing of the Mareb. Then came the decisive battles of spring and the fantastic march on Addis Ababa. Three sudden mass gatherings of the people unlike any in history, and then the triumphant night of May 9—the greatest surge of the collective soul of the Italian people.

At the highest levels of the regime, as well as throughout the country, no one doubted that the empire was an entirely Mussolinian achievement—one that the Duce had willed and directed like no other. With the fears of the previous year now forgotten, Victor Emmanuel III wished to grant him public and solemn recognition by awarding him the kingdom’s highest military decoration, the Grand Cross of the Order of Savoy, with the following citation:

As Minister of the Armed Forces, he prepared, led, and won the greatest colonial war in history—a war that he, as head of the king's government, foresaw as essential for the prestige, the very existence, and the greatness of the fascist fatherland.

And if Mussolini had not refused it ("Your Majesty, I have been and wish to remain only Mussolini… The Mussolinis have always been a family of farmers, and I am somewhat proud of that"), the king would have also conferred upon him the title of prince. As for the Grand Council, in its very brief meeting on May 9—convened to formalize the decision to proclaim "full and complete" Italian sovereignty over Ethiopia and the conferral of the title of emperor upon the king, it—upon De Bono's proposal—approved by acclamation a declaration of "the Fatherland's gratitude to the Duce," in which these words were followed by three others that, for Mussolini, must have meant far more than any noble title the sovereign could have granted him: "founder of the Empire."

After the uncertainties and fears that—as mentioned—had characterized the months leading up to the war, once hostilities began, the first victories were achieved in October–November 1935, and, above all, the advance resumed in 1936, the attitude of the vast majority of Italians toward the conflict had become not only increasingly supportive but—on the whole—patriotically committed, with outbursts that were not infrequently fiercely nationalistic.

The highly vigilant and diligent preventive and repressive activities of the regime's entire complex and multifaceted police apparatus—which, moreover, had been significantly strengthened for this purpose—certainly contributed to creating this climate. Through a number of skillful and successful operations (the brunt of which was borne primarily by the GL and the Communists) and, above all, through systematic surveillance and preventive measures, it had in fact succeeded in largely blocking the introduction and spread of such activities in Italy.

It would, however, be profoundly mistaken to believe that it was this activity that determined the climate we have been discussing.

This, in fact, was either—especially among the middle class and the youth—the consequence of a genuine and sincerely spontaneous phenomenon of collective engagement with the political, social, patriotic, and nationalistic aspects of the war, or it was the result—especially among the working class—of a mixture of suggestions and influences, some of a cultural nature, others of an emotional nature, partly autonomous, but to a much greater extent determined by the environment and especially by the massive, uninterrupted, and in its own way skillful, relentless barrage of the regime's propaganda. Nor can one underestimate the influence, in this regard, of the stance taken toward the war in Ethiopia by the clergy at all levels—from the Church's most prominent leaders to the bishops of minor dioceses, to ordinary parish priests, to military chaplains. Such a united, unanimous, and often exalted stance did not even spare those priests who, just four years earlier, had taken a stand against fascism or who had always maintained a hardline position toward it and had not hesitated to voice their reservations and criticisms.

A typical example is the case of the Bishop of Vicenza, Rodolfi, who went so far as to invoke Providence, reminding his faithful "that divine Providence rises above the poor human mind and

governs the affairs of nations in ways unknown to us and always for the wisest ends of mercy and good."

This attitude, moreover, not infrequently took on openly fascist tones.

To give just one example, consider this effusive act of faith in Mussolini by the Bishop of Terracina, Monsignor Navarra:

Those who delude themselves into thinking they can subdue our people, however, are mistaken, O Duce! Their efforts are in vain, for the times in Italy have changed: today Italy is Fascist, and the hearts of all Italians beat in unison with yours, and the nation is ready for any sacrifice for the triumph of peace and of human and Christian civilization… May God bless you, O Duce! May He sustain you in your daily, titanic work, and grant that… you may… witness the inevitable victory of the Italian armed forces.

And at times it even took on the tone of a religious crusade, as in this speech by the Bishop of Ozieri, Monsignor Serci:

This is not a matter of deciding on a colonial issue, since the colonial issue exists only between Italy and Ethiopia; nor is it merely a political issue, but also—and above all—a moral and religious one. Protestantism, which, in league with Freemasonry, communism, and anti-fascism, strives to bring down the civilization of Rome because it is Catholic. How could Protestants view the religious unity of the Italian people favorably, when they themselves are divided into a hundred and seven different denominations? How could all these people, together with the anti-fascists and the communists, tolerate the marvelous discipline of the Italian people, their moral and religious principles, and the unity of the family upheld by such vibrant institutions of the Fascist state—they who are all staunch advocates of divorce and have no morality other than that of their own selfishness?

Even in terms of the clergy's alignment—and, following them, that of the overwhelming majority of Catholics—with the regime's positions, the war in Ethiopia had set a record that, on closer inspection, would never be matched again, not even during the years of the Spanish Civil War, which fascism and the Church likewise portrayed in largely similar terms—as a struggle in defense of religion and against communism. Thus, it is extremely difficult to distinguish—especially after hostilities began—any substantial differences between the clergy's and the regime's views of the war, and at the same time to realistically assess whether the clergy's stance ultimately carried particular positive weight or was merely an additional, important, certainly, because it spared fascist propaganda from having to deal with "out-of-tune" voices or embarrassing silences, but not decisive and, perhaps, even corresponding

to that of the faithful.

Which, moreover, even if this were the reality of the situation, does not detract from the fact that, through its stance, the clergy certainly benefited the regime greatly on the international stage, especially among Italian communities abroad—both because it reaffirmed their commitment to the Italian cause and because it helped shield them from the opposing arguments of anti-fascism and of large sectors of the non-Italian Catholic clergy.

As for the role of the regime's propaganda apparatus, following what we have said in the previous chapter, we will not dwell on it further. More than any list we might provide of the most frequently used arguments, it seems to us that the words spoken in the Chamber of Deputies in early May by Alfieri, the Undersecretary for the Press and Propaganda—who was the true architect of propaganda during the war, given that Ciano had been in Africa for a long time as an air force officer—are best suited to evaluating it:

This propaganda had to… take on a truly combative stance. Faced with the world united against us, we had to demonstrate not only Italy's just cause, but also the benefit that civilization—and humanity itself—derived from Italy's undertaking.

"A truly combative stance": this definition sums it all up—form and substance alike—capturing the relentless, uncompromising, aggressive spirit that, during those months, was infused into every form of propaganda, at every level, against all "enemies," to set forth every objective to be achieved and, above all, to psychologically engage the entire country in the struggle and make it a participant in it. This last aspect is, in fact, in our view, the most significant—more so than those represented by the rhetorical exaltation of Italy's right to an empire, Rome's civilizing mission, the valor of Italian soldiers, and so on. It was, in fact, this aspect that—in a society like Italy's, which in many respects was not yet fully modern and therefore still largely unified and characterized by solidarity from a cultural standpoint—contributed most significantly at the grassroots level to bringing a large portion of the undecided and the rebellious into line with the collective attitude and, gradually, to making them psychologically conform to it so as not to appear as outsiders or, at worst, traitors.

The frequency and systematic nature with which the more strictly fascist press exploited the psychological fear of betrayal—imputed to those who did not feel national solidarity and did not cooperate in the struggle against sanctions—speak volumes to us. A few examples, taken from *Popolo d'Italia* during the early months of the war, seem to us to clarify our point of view:

November 6:

Anyone who, at this moment, unnecessarily prefers the products of sanctioning countries is a League

member and an Abyssinian—which is the same thing; this is tantamount to treason.

November 22:

Italian mothers whose sons are fighting in East Africa, remember that most of the sanctioning countries are sending weapons to Ethiopia, against your loved ones. Take revenge by boycotting goods from the sanctioning countries.

December 13:

You are stabbing our soldiers fighting in East Africa in the back if you deny them the means to win. To obtain these means, we need gold.

Give your gold to the Fatherland if you do not wish to betray those who, in the name of national honor and interests, are defending the honor and interests of your children.

December 25:

The truest and most useful patriotism is that validated by deeds. Only actions matter. Have you given to the Fatherland even the smallest amount of gold at your disposal? If you have not made this contribution—you who are able to do so—do not consider yourself a worthy Italian. And so, take action to avoid the remorse and shame that will haunt you forever. The present hour brooks no hesitation, selfishness, or cowardice.

Finally, another point to which we wish to draw attention is the extremely violent anti-British rhetoric

that characterized the Fascist propaganda campaign of those months. Indeed, while the general anti-sanctions rhetoric was extremely fierce—going so far as to preach and glorify national hatred against the sanctioning countries ("Our struggle must have no time limits; we must prepare our children and our grandchildren to hate the enemies of the Fatherland for years and centuries to come," wrote *Il regime fascista* on November 5, 1935 "The Fascist Regime") and to call for a new way of behaving toward them in the future as well ("The Italian people, deeply disappointed by the value of certain much-vaunted traditional friendships, must necessarily reevaluate from now on not only their diplomatic stance but also their very feelings: those sentiments which, at critical moments in history, prevail over every governmental commitment and drive nations toward their instinctive and fateful destinies," wrote the *Corriere della Sera* on November 16, 1935), the specifically anti-British polemic was even more violent. And to fuel it, no effort was spared, going so far as to ban the performance of works by English authors (with the sole exception of those by Shakespeare and Shaw, who had spoken out in very harsh terms against the sanctions), or forcing companies and public places to change their English names (or those presumed to be English) or even those that offended Italian national sensibilities (this was the case, for example, with the Hotel Eden in Rome). And especially among the middle class, the results were anything but modest and, more importantly, some of them would prove to be lasting.

All diplomats, journalists, and foreign observers offer consistent accounts of the vast scale of the phenomenon. As for its persistence after the end of the war—even when anti-British sentiment was gradually toned down by the regime and it seemed, at certain moments, such as during the 1937 gentlemen's agreement and the so-called "Easter Agreements" of the following year, that the regime was on the verge of reconciling with "Perfidious Albion" and even when popular hostility toward the Germans began to grow ever more intense—we will limit ourselves for the moment to just two observations: at the intellectual level—and not only among fascist intellectuals but, far more significantly, also among some decidedly anti-fascist intellectuals—as in the case of Gaetano De Sanctis—the conviction often persisted that "all things considered, Italy was right to oppose British hegemony in the Mediterranean"; and at a lower but broader level, if one can identify consistent patterns of attitude among those who fought in World War II, one such pattern is precisely a widespread anti-British sentiment, which, tellingly, has no parallel toward the other peoples with whom Italy was at war—the French, Greeks, Yugoslavs, and Russians.

If we add to these elements the enthusiasm for the victory achieved and for the end of the war, it is easy to understand the euphoria that characterized public opinion throughout Italy during the days of May 1936, and which in Rome took the form of massive rallies on May 5, 9, and 24—certainly the most spectacular and spontaneous in the entire history of fascism.

Ugo Ojetti left us an image of the rally on May 9 that deserves to be quoted at length, both because it captures the atmosphere so well and, above all, because it constitutes, in its own right, one of the most significant documents for understanding the kind of imperial rhetoric and extreme Mussoliniism that emerged in Rome on those days, at ten o'clock in the evening.

While waiting for the Duce to appear on the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, the crowd in the square—bathed in the flickering light of the spotlights—rises and falls, almost breathing like the sea does when clouds drift across the sun.

I am fortunate enough to be looking out from the small balcony… of the Misciatelli Palace… the crowd still has distinct bodies, faces, voices, and gestures, and swirling, undulating waves that, behind a fanfare, a flag, or a sign, try to wedge themselves into the thick of the crowd and suddenly have to stop because those already there form a wall; but beneath the pine trees over there, on Via dell'Impero, the view in profile is so still and compact that only the heads are visible, without shoulders, huddled together like the cobblestones of a paved street; on the terraces of the Monument, this "pavement" becomes more even—row upon row of the troops' helmets, lined up by branch of service.

On the Capitoline Hill, everything is a symbol, and tonight all the symbols are crystal clear… The more time passes, the more this electricity penetrates us all. It does not intoxicate us; on the contrary, it illuminates us and sharpens our minds, so that not only the present but also the future seems as clear and certain to us as the past: the past of Rome… At times, the beam of a searchlight rises vertically, scanning the firmament in search of who knows what, and faces turn upward to gaze at the infinite, as if to decipher something against the blackness of the night. At the top of that shaft of light, an omen. As thousands upon thousands of faces rise together, the crowd suddenly glows with a rosy hue. These moments of unity—even physical unity—bring joy to the multitude. They keep their eyes fixed on the balcony with the red banner so intently that it seems as though Mussolini might step out of it by magic, drawn by a will that, for once, is stronger than his own. − Du-ce, du-ce, du-ce.

The cry always begins at the edge of that sea of people, as if those furthest away were trying to draw closer to the palace with their voices, unable to approach in person. Immediately the rhythm spreads, pounding the square, appeasing the yearning—indeed, the craving—to speak, breathe, hope, believe, love, hate, act together, to be not a hundred thousand, but a single entity, as strong as a hundred thousand.

Three trumpet blasts. Over there, they haven't heard them and continue to shout, to call out, to invoke. And there he stands, upright, motionless, his square face, his hands on the marble of the parapet. When did he come out? When did he appear? It seems as though he has always been there, as though those broad shoulders have always been at the center of the tall window, like the jambs, like the windowsill.

Everyone had imagined him so vividly that, upon seeing him alive and real, there was a moment of astonishment, a moment of stunned silence; then shouts and applause erupted, rumbling from one mass of people to another, filling the air with echoes, so that when one opened one's mouth, one breathed in clamor and breathed out clamor. With their voices, their arms, their handkerchiefs, and on tiptoe, they try to rise up toward him, to stand out; and if for an instant they pause, they smile happily, almost as if thinking: He heard me, he saw me.

Signs, flags, banners, and pennants are nothing but longer arms, longer hands, waving.

How long did Mussolini gaze upon that outstretched crowd? How long did he revel in the crashing of those waves against his broad chest? He furrowed his brow, threw his head back as if to break free from the spell, and raised his right hand—the salute; but to the crowd it seemed an invitation to move forward into the world, into the life of the world, freely, with their ranks thus closed, for the path is now open. And the applause begins to crackle, and the clamor to roar.

With his palm, he signals for them to stop, to be silent. Then he smiles, with his broad smile. Only then, at that sign of loving affection—as if in reward for having broken through the stern, closed expression—does the crowd fall silent. The last shouts die away on the distant edges, toward the Imperial Forums.

And he begins: “Officers, noncommissioned officers, enlisted men…” He enunciates each syllable, drawing out the glides right to the last vowel, calm and confident, his breath—as they say in singing—perfectly controlled, so well that his clear, ringing voice, without a single flaw, lends the terse words a vivid certainty, a sense of vitality. Each word is like a measured step forward. “Italy finally has its Empire.”

The crowd’s attention is so unanimous and profound that the applause always erupts a moment after the announcement worthy of applause, as if those listening were making an effort to snap out of their spell and respond. Mussolini has already begun speaking again, and the applause forces him to pause. He runs a hand over his lips, gesturing once more for silence—a good-natured gesture that seems to say: “Wait, for there is something better to come.”

At times it seems as though he reads our hearts, putting into words what we feel but cannot say—the beating of our hearts into words, the words into a command… And now he himself announces “the reappearance of the Empire on the fateful hills of Rome”… And now Mussolini admonishes: “This cry is a sacred oath that binds you before God…”.

So it is: from one proclamation to the next, he has kindled such a flame within us, lifted us so high that that brief and infinite word has appeared to the people as a natural calling beyond life itself. A cry answers him, as if to say that, yes, God is already in everyone’s heart. At that moment, beneath the great dome of the sky, the square resembles a temple.

“Hail to the King.” Those are his last words, his hand raised high. The Duce stands motionless, just as he did at the beginning, both hands clasped on the marble ledge. It seems as though he is supporting

himself, rather than leaning on it.

Commenting on the enthusiasm and exaltation of those days, Ettore Conti noted in his diary:

How easily our people are swept up in enthusiasm; and how, unaware of Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories*, they are stirred by the call of the Empire! I must acknowledge at once, and with bitterness, how Mussolini exerts a—I would say hypnotic—influence over the masses. While we, the so-called ruling classes, whom he hates, sense the artifice of his speeches and his politics—which we have no way of countering except with fruitless criticism—the people flock around him in demonstrations of support that are now called, and indeed often are, "oceanic," and they become elated, confirming him in his presumption of infallibility. Dangerous!

Together with the note from the same period by Marshal Caviglia, cited in the previous chapter, this one from the influential Milanese industrialist and financier allows us to begin looking behind the facade—that is, to seek a deeper understanding of the true meaning of that enthusiasm and exaltation and to grasp to what extent they—and the undoubted increase in prestige that resulted for the Duce personally—translated into actual support for Mussolini's policies. It would, in fact, be incorrect to assume that the enthusiasm, the exaltation, and the very increase in Mussolini's personal prestige translated, quite simply, into an equal intensity of political support. However, drawing a clear distinction between these two aspects of the issue is extremely difficult, if not impossible, both because of the scarcity of truly reliable documentation that could be generalized without arbitrariness, and because the two aspects were almost never objectively distinguishable even at the time, since, apart from limited, clearly anti-fascist circles (for whom, of course, enthusiasm was also absent), the question is not whether support existed or not, but rather to assess to what extent it was unqualified or more or less tinged with reservations, critical concerns, and worries about the future (economic, social, and international) and, furthermore, what the potential of these reservations, these critical reasons, and these concerns was, and, at the same time, what alternative solutions could objectively be considered at a time like that, when the idea of overthrowing the regime was absurd.

There is no doubt that fascism and the regime emerged from the war in Ethiopia objectively strengthened. Even militant anti-fascism acknowledged this in no uncertain terms. What Carlo Rosselli wrote in the aftermath of the war's conclusion is truly significant in this regard:

It is better to acknowledge with manly frankness that fascism, at least on the domestic front—which is, after all, what concerns us most of all—emerges strengthened and consolidated by this crisis. Many people who still believed a rapid solution was possible and harbored lingering resentments will convert to fascism. Others will resign themselves to the situation. The social upheaval will be deflected and

contained. We are entering a phase of relative liquidation for some and relative stabilization for others. A series of developments in the postwar period that might have been decisive for the opposition will have a much more limited significance and will be easily dominated by fascism. Even the economic and financial difficulties—which are undeniable and growing—will not be sufficient to threaten the regime following its recent success. Dictatorships have never fallen for economic or financial reasons. Economic difficulties may, if anything, push them to seek a diversion in war. But once the war is won, the diversion works, and the crisis is contained.

As the Paris-based *Il nuovo avanti* (which the previous summer had deluded itself into believing that the situation in Italy was moving in a revolutionary direction) had been forced to acknowledge since the beginning of the year, the war had caused the anti-fascist positions—whether more or less individual in nature or those of small liberal-democratic or reformist groups—to collapse almost completely, leading, at least for the moment, to their co-optation by the regime under a patriotic banner.

In an article from Italy—somewhat schematic and simplistic, but realistic on the whole—the Socialist Party's organ had described the phenomenon as follows:

In Italy, before the current crisis, anti-fascism brought together a wide array of currents that were highly diverse in origin, orientation, and values. The fascist regime, by concentrating all the functions and profits of the state in the hands of a few, had harmed too many interests and wounded too many pride: the ranks of the anti-fascist movement had been particularly swelled—and perhaps weighed down—by the former holders of those interests and that pride. These individuals, due to the positions they had previously held and their political past, with their offended attitude as those who had been ousted, had led to misunderstandings about the true nature of their stance toward fascism: what was merely a form was mistaken for substance. Today, amid the new climate of the Italian-Ethiopian conflict, under the traditional clamour of alarm bells proclaiming the homeland in danger, all these opponents of the regime have suddenly felt their hearts filled with uncompromising patriotism, and with the meagre offerings of their medals and ribbons, they have crossed the river and taken refuge on the other side. The loss is not serious in and of itself; but the sensationalist noise the fascist press is making about it could truly cause us considerable harm among the masses. Finally, the defection of 1914 is repeating itself, albeit in a more convenient and less boisterous form: faced with a waving flag and four blasts of a fanfare, the rebels are melting like wax, and the ranks of the warmongers and extremists are swelling ever larger.

The forces of anti-fascism, therefore, have been quantitatively weakening: the cry of "the homeland in danger" has acted like a violent chemical reagent, precipitating the situation: ambiguous positions and complex attitudes have not held up: a clear and decisive divide has emerged between anti-fascist consciences and all others; and the current state of affairs is the exact reflection of the battlefield on which we must fight to achieve our goals.

The fascist regime, which initially arose as a shield for the bourgeoisie, became monarchist out of tactical necessity, and took up the habit of a monk in the hope of saving both body and soul, now holds in its hands the three great organized forces of the country: the army, the clergy, and finance. It is useless to harbor illusions: fascism has indissolubly bound these three great forces to itself. It is true that, at the beginning of this crisis, there were hints of schisms, splits, and defections, but ultimately the bourgeoisie, the Church, and the monarchy—fearing what might come next—marched in lockstep to support the regime to the very end.

Nor had things gone much better for organized militant anti-fascism, which—already weak before the war and subjected to the harshest repression—had found itself increasingly depleted of its best elements, who were gradually identified and arrested, and even more isolated within the country and—as if that were not enough—facing ever-greater difficulties in maintaining effective communication both with the leadership in exile and among its own members in the underground.

As early as December 1935, this situation was so serious that the domestic socialist center had to describe it to comrades in the Paris leadership in these terms:

Regarding relations with other anti-fascist currents, we inform you that here we have no knowledge of the existence of groups affiliated with GL or the Republican Party. The liberal and democratic groups with which we are in contact appear to have ties to these organizations in exile. As for the communists, the situation, as far as we can tell, is as follows. The official Party is in a state of severe disorganization and prostration. Apart from the openly dissident elements—who in certain centers outnumber the orthodox members—we have been able to establish contact only with either members of the Communist Party who, either because they are not held in high regard or because they are dormant, lack representative authority; or with members who, still unaware of the Stalinists' new directives, maintain their old, across-the-board hostile attitude toward other anti-fascist movements.

The most serious setback, however, was the ever-increasing difficulties that the anti-fascist movement encountered (and not just recently) among the masses. The anti-fascist documentation of the time and the anti-fascist press itself speak volumes in this regard. After the illusions and bold resolutions of the months preceding the outbreak of hostilities and the initial victories, the picture that emerges is disheartening. The masses did not rebel against the war; they were "disoriented," "inert," and "psychologically corrupted" by fascist propaganda.

Even where, among older workers, the war was met with greater skepticism and a critical eye, "the general and deep-seated fear of an impending European conflict" led them "to show solidarity within the country and against foreign powers."

“Thus, on the whole, as the Socialist underground reported from Paris in the aforementioned December 1935 report, not only is there no sign of a socialist awakening among the masses, but there is also an incredible hold by the regime’s demagogic and chauvinistic propaganda, especially in its anti-British aspects. The notion that ‘British selfishness’ stands in the way of the ‘just’ aspirations of ‘proletarian’ Italy is undeniably felt.”

Nor was this assessment held solely by the Socialists. After the war, *Lo Stato operaio* would in fact also acknowledge that:

some themes of fascist war propaganda, though not original, exerted a considerable influence on significant segments of the population, especially the youth, because they were presented as unquestionable truths that were easy to understand. The distinction between rich and poor nations, bourgeois and proletarian nations, leads to the justification of proletarian war—of poor nations against rich nations—and of war for “social justice among nations,” which would divide the world more reasonably than it is now and give poor nations a share of what rich nations currently possess.

These arguments, which mask the true cause of the Italian people’s misery and the true cause of war under the capitalist system, find a certain resonance among the masses living in destitution with no hope for the future, particularly among young people.

And today we know that R. Grieco himself—at that time the political leader of the Communist Party—was even more pessimistic.

At the working-class level, he believed three groups could be distinguished: “a minority of older militant workers from the various left-wing parties,” for whom any revolutionary program at that time was madness; “a vast mass of workers influenced by fascism,” who were sensitive only “to the issue of modest material demands”; and “a group of true fascists,” which, in his view, was made up of the most opportunistic elements.

In this climate—even setting aside a series of tactical and psychological errors committed by the anti-fascist movement (the spread of slogans that were too crudely defeatist, of false or exaggerated reports on the internal situation in Italy and on certain expressions of discontent, which were generally merely reflections of local realities and economic hardships, of recurring announcements of the regime’s imminent collapse, etc.)—the war, rather than facilitating the penetration and contacts of clandestine groups among the masses, had made them more difficult and less productive than in the past, to the point of forcing nearly everyone to reevaluate their views on the Italian reality and, along with them, not infrequently, their methods of struggle and even the prospects for that struggle.

A typical example is that of C. Rosselli, who wrote in the aforementioned article of May 15, 192:

Old-style anti-fascism is dead. Dead are all the formal and organizational positions that drag along with them the burden—or even just the fate—of defeat, the obligation of ahistorical consistency, or the ties to outdated and ambiguous approaches.

The most sensational case, however, was certainly that of the communists. Having finally convinced themselves that banking on a short-term crisis of the regime was absurd—disappointed, not to say traumatized, by the attitude of the masses during the war—and drawing from this attitude more than was objectively justified—they in fact inaugurated, as soon as the conflict ended, a new political line that—by taking to the extreme the new strategy of popular fronts that the Comintern had officially enshrined at its Seventh Congress and which had yielded such good results in Spain and France—completely revolutionized the terms of their political and propaganda approach to the Italian reality.

This new line, in fact, not only sought to avoid offending the national sentiment—which had been heightened at all levels by the war in Ethiopia—and aimed to capitalize on the irreconcilability between popular expectations, exacerbated by fascism's social demagoguery, and the regime's policies, but it even went so far—in order to forge new ties with the masses—as to claim the stance of the Italian masses as its own.

Given the background to this new line and the different approach it took toward implementing the 19th-century fascist program—and seeking, on that platform, to forge ties with the rank and file and even with the middle ranks of fascism for a common struggle against "the oligarchy of financiers, big industrialists, and large landowners," "a handful of families who are the true masters of the country," which "is the cause of our miseries, of the oppression in which we live, of the policy of war," and which "opposes the fulfillment of the promises made to the Italian people, because it does not want to pay."

Hence, in June, the call for the "reconciliation of the Italian people," with which the communists addressed the fascist masses directly:

We extend our hand to the fascists, our brothers in labor and suffering, because we want to fight alongside them in the just and holy battle for bread, work, and peace. Everything we want—fascists and non-fascists alike—we can achieve by uniting and raising our voice, which is the voice of the people. Fascists, and veterans of Africa, win for the people the right to speak in all organizations. Let every organization, every club, every union become the beating heart of a reconciled nation, against its enemies who starve and oppress it, against the handful of parasites who rule our beautiful country.

We communists want to make Italy strong, free, and happy. Our aspiration is also yours, O fascists, Catholics, and Italian men of every political opinion and every religious faith.

Let us unite. Let us unite as one heart and one will. Let us unite everywhere and at all times. Let us speak with one voice: that of the interests of the people and the country. Let us fight united—for our bread, for our work, for our peace—so that Italy may be wrested from its enemies and restored to the Italians, so that Italy may be saved from catastrophe.

This appeal was solemnly reaffirmed in August with a very lengthy document, signed by the entire Communist leadership operating in exile and published by *Lo Stato operaio* under the title *For the Salvation of Italy and the Reconciliation of the Italian People*, in which the Fascist program of 1919 was defined as “a program of peace, freedom, and the defense of workers’ interests” and, addressing both young Fascists and those of the “old guard” in the name of the “reconciliation of the Italian people,” it declared:

We proclaim that we are prepared to fight alongside you and the entire Italian people for the realization of the 1919 Fascist program, and for every demand that expresses an immediate, particular, or general interest of the workers and the Italian people. We are willing to fight alongside anyone who truly wishes to battle against the handful of parasites who are bleeding the nation dry and oppressing it, and against those leaders who serve them. For our struggle to be crowned with success, we must seek the reconciliation of the Italian people by reestablishing the nation’s unity and overcoming the criminal division created among our people by those who had an interest in shattering their brotherhood. We must unite the working class and, through it, achieve the unity of the people, marching together as brothers. For bread, for work, for the land, for peace, and for freedom.

And again, in late September, the Communist Central Committee would have moved along the same lines, despite the criticism unanimously directed at it by the rest of the anti-fascist movement—both in exile and underground—and, above all, despite the fact that a civil war had been raging in Spain since mid-July, with all that it entailed both in terms of the radicalization of the fascism-anti-fascism conflict and its repercussions in Italy, among those masses who, in their powerlessness and despair, were considered by the Communist leaders in exile to be far more integrated into the system and far less responsive to the call for freedom than they actually were.

This is, in fact, the real crux of the matter that must be unraveled in order to understand the actual attitude of the working classes—and in particular the working class—toward the regime as it stood at the conclusion of the war in Ethiopia.

To say that these classes had been largely psychologically drawn into the war by fascist propaganda and had to some extent shared both the justifications it had provided for the war and the hopes and myths of a future prosperity that all of Italy would derive from the empire is to limit oneself to a single aspect of the problem, even if it is certainly the most conspicuous one.

Alongside this, however, was another aspect, just as real as the first, even if less conspicuous—especially for those who judged Italian reality by now almost exclusively from thethe outside and based on a standard of judgment that was partly abstractly ideological and partly by then inadequate for understanding a reality very different from the one for which it had been devised—and, moreover, judged it under the traumatic impression of having had to acknowledge that those social classes had behaved toward the war in a manner contrary to all their convictions and predictions.

This aspect, moreover, did not escape the watchful eye—all realism and pragmatism—of the Fascist police and their informants, as well as that part of the National Fascist Party (PNF) that lived the lives of workers in factories, unions, after-work clubs, and everyday life. So much so that it is from these sources that this aspect emerges most clearly and considerably earlier than from others. To summarize and generalize at the same time, this second aspect can be identified as follows.

At the mass level, the psychological involvement of the working classes—and especially the working class—in the war in Ethiopia did not amount to full political consensus toward the Fascist regime: reservations (as well as expressions of approval) persisted, and with them the concerns and dissatisfactions related to living and working conditions, fears regarding the sacrifices and risks that Mussolini's foreign policy might still entail, and aspirations for a different political order. A different political order which—speaking generally and simplifying matters—for the older generation remained almost always the one they had longed for in their youth, so that those OVRA informants were essentially correct when, in the midst of the African War, they emphasized that the vast majority of workers in the major industrial centers "although apparently part of the Fascist trade union organizations, and although members of the Party, remained what they had always been, that is, socialists and communists by conviction."

Whereas for young people, this different political orientation might have been the same as that of their fathers (especially in families with a certain tradition of "subversive" political activism or of not having recently moved to the city), more often, however, it was instead conceived within the framework and from the perspective of Fascism—and often more specifically, Mussolini's vision—which, moreover, was characterized by bringing to the forefront a whole series of social and progressive ideas and demands, more or less explicitly anti-capitalist, as well as aspirations toward self-management and the democratization of the internal workings of the unions.

Viewed from this perspective, the issue of the popular masses' attitude toward the regime in the aftermath of the Ethiopian War appears far more nuanced, complex, and "open" than it might seem at first glance—and than it appeared at the time to a segment of the anti-fascist émigré community. And when viewed from this perspective, it becomes clear how, within a few months—first in the wake of the Popular Front's victory in the French elections (which, by confirming the victory of the Spanish Popular Front a few months earlier, gave it a sort of trend-setting significance) and then, above all, following the Spanish Civil War—the terms of this movement began to undergo certain changes, certainly not earth-shattering, but just as certainly significant, if only because they demonstrate that the war in Ethiopia had had less of an impact than had been believed—and than one might believe.

And, in particular, it becomes clear that there still existed—albeit latent or, if you prefer, dormant—a series of anti-fascist potentials that, ultimately, were waiting for nothing more than to be set in motion again, reawakened, provided there were the right stimuli and, even more so, concrete prospects for anti-fascist action.

The police records are also extremely telling in this regard. The first signs that something was stirring beneath the ashes appeared immediately after the French elections. Even before the end of June, reports were reaching Rome from various regions—especially in the north—that can be summarized by the words used in one such report sent from Milan on June 25:

The socialist advances that have taken place in France, with the “Popular Front” government coming to power, as well as the political situation that has arisen in Spain, have undoubtedly fostered, within subversive circles, the hope—if not the conviction—of an inevitable impact, favorable to subversive parties, on the internal political situation in Italy. This has come to the attention of this Office through confidential reports and the body of evidence gathered by the various investigative services.

With the arrival of summer, coinciding with the outbreak and the very early stages of the Spanish Civil War, this phenomenon gradually gained momentum, so much so that the year-end report on public order prepared by the Ministry of the Interior includes this significant statement:

While the Ethiopian campaign had no effect in favor of the anti-fascist political parties—but rather strengthened the patriotic spirit of the Italian people and even led quite a few anti-fascists to reexamine their convictions—the victories of the “popular fronts,” in the French and Spanish general elections first, and the Spanish Civil War later, had an undeniable impact on that segment of the Italian population that did not wholeheartedly support the Regime.

These echoes of the French and, above all, Spanish events should not be overestimated. In fact, they affected only limited circles and certainly did not create difficulties for the regime. They—we repeat—do, however, clearly indicate that the enthusiasm and elation sparked by the African victory were short-lived and not sufficient to foster a new kind of consensus among the working classes, at least in the sense of an actual strengthening of that consensus; thus, ultimately, this consensus emerged from the Ethiopian War, if not weakened—though to claim this would be an exaggeration at the mass level—at least more undermined than before by sources of dissatisfaction, criticism, and potentially growing fears. Nor did this phenomenon occur solely among the working classes. Although the motivations were partially or entirely different, the same phenomenon also occurred at nearly all other social levels. This was particularly true among young people, intellectuals, and the business community.

It was far less pronounced, however, among the lower and middle classes, where national-patriotic (and often simply nationalist) motivations, imperial rhetoric, and the glorification of the Duce were—again, generalizing—more widespread, more deeply rooted, and more enduring.

Particularly serious for the regime were the repercussions the war had among young people and

intellectuals. Despite the limitations and characteristics we have mentioned, the first half of the 1930s had seen participation by both groups in the life of the regime that, while less than the regime had desired, was nonetheless not negligible. The debates on youth, corporatism, and universal fascism had resonated widely and had engaged and inspired a significant number of young people and intellectuals. Nor had there been a lack of more or less serious attempts, in small groups, to develop ideas for cultural and socio-political reform and reconstruction within the framework of fascism.

Among these groups, the best known was the one led and influenced by Ruggero Zangrandi and Vittorio Mussolini. It was not, however, the only one. In some cases, these debates and groups had given rise to more or less dissident positions, which, however, had proved incapable of reaching extreme conclusions or—if anyone had gone that far—had led to the de facto dissolution of the group in which they had developed, since for most, a shift to anti-fascist positions was inconceivable. The overall outcome, therefore, had not been entirely negative for the regime.

As the outbreak of hostilities drew near, Mussolini—who had, in fact, been one of the main proponents of this participation and had encouraged it by allowing, especially among the young, a certain programmatic leeway for criticism and "heresy"—had nevertheless decided that—at least for the time being—it was necessary to put the brakes on. Such a decision was typical of the Duce's mindset. For him, in wartime everything had to be homogeneous, "totalitarian"; the existence of "out-of-tune" voices was inconceivable, since they would have represented a discordant note in the picture of the country that had to be presented to both Italians and foreigners, and young people now had to act and fight, not debate.

Nor can it be ruled out that two other concerns also influenced his decision: the interest that the anti-fascist émigré press had shown in certain debates of previous years and in the critical positions taken by some youth groups; and the emerging tendency among young fascists—precisely in anticipation of the war—to raise the question of the new substance that the war would finally give to fascism. Moreover, it is significant that the crackdown of 1935 (which, among other things, marked the end of B. Ricci's *Universale* and *Cantiere*) was not directed solely against young people and left-wing fascism, but also affected certain periodicals and groups of "elders" and right-wing fascism: a typical example in this regard was the case of G. A. Fanelli's *Secolo fascista*.

The consequences of Mussolini's decision, however, were extremely grave. At a time when many young fascists—convinced that they were pioneers who, during a period of transition, were striving to create a new order in the spiritual realm and in concrete political, economic, and social reality—were ready to fight provided that the struggle was truly worthwhile, that is, if it could lead to a renewal of fascism and of Italian society, and were convinced that, as "true" fascists, they were fully capable of exercising self-discipline within their own freedom, yet—at the same time—they rebelled deep within themselves (partly consciously, partly instinctively) against the formalism, the narrow-mindedness of fascism, and the imperiousness and self-assurance of its propaganda, at this particularly delicate moment, Mussolini's decision to shut down all discussion and reduce everything to "believe, obey, and fight" triggered a very serious crisis among the majority of these young people.

Many were, in fact, overcome by a sense of dissatisfaction, disappointment, and frustration that manifested itself, depending on the case, either as a lack of interest in active politics and a distancing from it, or as passive and opportunistic conformism, or "passive indifference, through which one practices that form of absenteeism that stems from avoiding responsibility, shifting work onto others, and blindly—and therefore almost always unwisely—submitting to orders and directives."

In August 1940, retracing the history of the relationship between Fascism and culture in a lengthy letter-report to Mussolini, Bottai—who in 1935–36 had sought to some extent to interpret the state of mind of young Fascist intellectuals—summarized this phenomenon and its consequences for the regime as follows:

While it is true that over twenty years of Fascism, new ideas have increasingly shaped the life of the country, radically transforming it, it is equally true that, as far as culture is concerned, a conflict has deepened, causing intellectuals to become entrenched in a sterile conservatism. One could speak of a Fascist cultural movement in the early years of the revolution, based on certain nationalistic and idealistic elements that took concrete form in the reforms of 1925–26 and then culminated in the first manifestations of corporatism, both before and after the Charter of Labor.

With the decline of nationalism and idealism, the Fascist cultural movement then shifted toward an increasingly corporatist direction, developing the more strictly revolutionary aspect of the new social conception. This was, perhaps, the most fruitful period of collaboration: that segment of Italian culture that participated in it succeeded in truly positioning itself on a revolutionary plane and in forcing the larger conservative segment to enter the arena of debate and to collaborate indirectly as well. The years from 1932 to 1936 were, from this perspective, the most fruitful; and our revolutionary idea exerted a considerable influence abroad at that time, primarily on National Socialism, which, having come to power in 1933, looked to Fascism to follow its example.

But with the outbreak of the war in Ethiopia, Italian culture fell silent, renouncing any further collaboration. On the theoretical level, the increasingly rigorous critique directed against idealism definitively estranged it from the revolutionary process. On the social level, the end of the debate surrounding the principles of corporatism halted the development of the new political and economic science.

With the revolutionary minority silenced, the old conservative culture found itself without opponents and strengthened its positions, masking itself in part with an outward, sycophantic deference toward the regime… Becoming increasingly anti-revolutionary, the intellectual class retreated to its traditional positions. On the other hand, the demands of the revolution on the political front—separate from the cultural movement among us—were forced to rely on the ideologies of National Socialism, which was rapidly advancing along its own path. This constituted, on our part, an implicit renunciation of our birthright, which in turn actually intensified the hostility of the cultural establishment and fueled a reactionary movement that spread to the working classes.

Without delving into Bottai’s analysis of the long term for the moment, it suffices here to emphasize

that the end of the war changed very little about this reality—both because the psychological and moral consequences of Mussolini's decision subsided only very partially, and because, in the country's difficult economic situation, many young people, plagued by concerns about their future, either became increasingly detached from politics or resigned themselves to finding a place within the PNF and its affiliated organizations, adapting to the prevailing atmosphere there; and finally, because the hopes for a renewal of fascism—which began circulating again immediately after the victory and which, undoubtedly, reinvigorated certain youth circles (and not only youth and intellectual circles) for a few months— but soon turned into a new source of disappointment and frustration, a feeling of exclusion—and for many young people, joining the Littoriali became one of the few ways to escape this.

In fact, by 1936, these groups had taken on a very particular character: for the regime, they served as a safety valve to vent, in a fairly harmless manner, the dissatisfaction of a large portion of those who participated in them; for the participants themselves, they provided an outlet for their presumption—or illusion—of being the "true" fascism and of having the right to dictate what it should be.

To understand the attitude of the best segment of the youth and of certain fascist intellectuals after the Ethiopian War, it is significant to examine certain positions that emerged among them, particularly in the early months—that is, before the regime's propaganda machine imposed its own interpretation—but sometimes also later, during the Spanish Civil War. These positions, in fact, contain certain observations, such as those regarding the dire living conditions of the Spanish working classes, the overwhelming power of the clergy in Spanish society and its excessive influence over the nationalists, and the need for the nationalists not to repeat the mistakes once made by General Primo de Rivera (regarding whom some recalled the criticisms that had been leveled at his "dictatorship" at the time) and, above all, the need to avoid associating and confusing the "true and authentic" "revolutionary" Mussolini-style fascism with the conservatism and pure reactionary nature of the Spanish variety—regarding which Aquarone quite rightly wrote:

The attempt by some representatives of fascist political thought to identify the deep historical roots of the Spanish crisis, by rejecting the trite and superficial explanation of an international conspiracy of atheistic communism allied with Freemasonry and by laying bare the country's dramatic social and economic contradictions and the responsibilities of its traditional ruling class, was at least partially part of an effort to reevaluate the social content of the fascist revolution and to make, albeit a veiled, denunciation of the regime's conservative ossification. The discussions regarding the Spanish Civil War and its origins often seemed to be aimed at the daughter-in-law so that the mother-in-law might understand; they were discussions that sought, more or less deliberately and articulately, to revive themes and debates dear to the—let us say—"left-wing" interpreters of fascism.

One point, in fact, must be kept firmly in mind. Despite everything we have said, it would be profoundly mistaken to believe that—save for individual cases, which were significant but not representative—at the level of youth and intellectuals, there were phenomena of a shift from fascism to antifascism immediately after the war in Ethiopia. Nor should this come as a surprise.

Aside from the fact that, at this level, no one at the time believed "that the wheel of fascism could turn

in a direction unfavorable to it," this was prevented, on the one hand, by contempt for democratic states (whose conduct during the war and their recent internal affairs were certainly not such as to attract sympathy) and, by extension, for democracy itself; on the other hand, by the conviction that—despite all its errors and shortcomings—fascism had "accurately identified the problem of overcoming the old democratic world, freeing the country's political life from a formula that had by then become obsolete." So much so, with regard to this second point, that if there was any curiosity or interest at all, it was directed—if anything—not toward democracy but toward communism, viewed essentially as a response to democracy and as a form of state organization—antithetical to fascist ones, yet stemming from the same anti-democratic premises.

The business world had undoubtedly reaped—albeit to varying degrees depending on the sector—significant profits from the war in Ethiopia. Overall, however, it certainly cannot be said that the business world did not have its own problems and emerged from the war without concerns. Perhaps the most important issue for it was that of exports—a serious problem for everyone, but especially for smaller firms, given that the February 1935 regulations on import controls had very often placed them at a disadvantage compared to larger firms.

Depending on the sector, the problem manifested itself in different ways and offered different possible solutions; for all sectors, however, it was the necessary prerequisite for reviving production and regaining those markets—especially in Central and Southeastern Europe—that had been partially lost (generally to Germany's advantage) during the sanctions period.

However, various difficulties stood in the way of a revival of exports and, more generally, of production. First and foremost was the problem—particularly after the devaluation of the dollar and the pound was compounded by that of the French and Swiss francs and the florin—of the steadily declining competitiveness of Italian products, caused by the lira's peg to the now unsustainable "quota novanta."

There had been considerable pressure in favor of a devaluation of the lira since the spring and summer of 1935 (FIAT, in particular, had bombarded Mussolini and the monetary authorities with requests to that effect and carried out stock market maneuvers that were viewed in Rome as a boycott of the war preparations). Now this pressure became even more insistent, to the point that—as will be seen—Mussolini ultimately had to yield and authorize, on October 5, 1936, a 40.9% reduction in the lira's intrinsic value relative to the parity set in 1927.

Other concerns stemmed from the difficulties that certain companies—those most heavily involved in the war effort—were facing in converting their production and—especially for smaller firms and certain sectors that had not yet fully recovered from the crisis of previous years—from the government's apparent intention to pursue a policy of wage increases (between July 1936 and February 1937, wages were set to rise by an average of about 10%, approaching their prewar real value) and to relax control over the unions (which, in turn, tended to intensify their activities). Nor, moreover, can another aspect be underestimated: that of the economic development of the empire.

According to Mussolini's plans, this was to be launched immediately and completed by 1942 so as to achieve, in De Stefani's words, the "Italian-Ethiopian economic integration." In particular, the development of the empire was to focus on six objectives:

1) creating the general conditions for civil life and economic development (primarily through the construction of an adequate road network and the establishment of several pilot urban centers);

2) local production to meet the needs of the indigenous population and of immigrants from Italy;

3) large-scale permanent (settlement) and temporary immigration from the mother country;

4) development of local production for export;

5) identification and exploitation of local raw materials;

6) trade with the mother country and, at a later stage, the development of the AOI's foreign trade.

There were high expectations in the country in this regard. Suffice it to say that between 1936 and 1938, there were over 600,000 applications to go to work in Ethiopia. Of these, however, only slightly more than 198,000 were accepted during the same period, and many of the workers who were in East Africa at the end of the war in the wake of the army (and a good portion of whom would have liked to remain there more or less permanently) ended up returning home.

Apart from specific and relatively minor sectors, and apart from companies interested in government contracts, the Italian business community was, however, quite reluctant—if not outright opposed—to commit to the empire, preferring other, more traditional and secure investments. Consequently, in deference to the regime's wishes, there was a proliferation of studies and plans for the empire's development, but in practice, the commitment remained relatively modest and, above all, largely contingent on the government's provision of concrete aid and various forms of compensation.

A typical expression of this attitude is the section of Volpi's report to the Confindustria council in December 1936 dedicated to "Industry and the Empire." In it, in fact, after much patriotic rhetoric and some general statements of full agreement with the Duce's directives, we find this truly telling passage:

And now, allow me to offer a few brief remarks on a topic of vital interest to industry and to the national economy in general.

Clearly, colonial economic policy is not aimed solely at supplying raw materials to the metropolises.

It must also address the issue of populating the colonies with agricultural labor from the mother country, both to strengthen the colonies and to alleviate demographic pressure within the national territory.

This does not, of course, preclude a certain degree of industrial organization in Ethiopia: this is necessary both for the country's civil and social infrastructure; for the production of consumer goods that, by their very nature, must be consumed within a short distance from the center of production; for the production of goods that cannot bear the cost of long-distance transport and for which the necessary raw materials are available locally; and, finally, for those activities—especially artisanal ones—that

satisfy the basic needs of colonial life and do not require complex facilities or a large specialized workforce.

But it must be seriously considered—and not merely from an economic standpoint—whether there is truly an opportunity to promote the development of other industrial activities, both for domestic consumption and, even more so, for export.

When so many markets are closed, completely or almost completely, to international trade, one must ask whether the needs of the national economy warrant the establishment, in the colonies, of industries capable of excluding or even merely limiting the importation of products from the mother country, or even of competing with them on world markets.

One must also ask whether, in the colonial territories of Africa in general, the essential elements for a genuine industrial organization exist, since it is evident that the availability of raw materials on site is not sufficient for this purpose.

Moreover, agricultural and industrial activity, aimed at streamlining the production of raw materials in the Empire's territories, will be a source of income for the Empire, especially when production is carried out primarily by settlers, entrepreneurs, and workers who have taken up permanent residence there. This income and wealth, by increasing the consumption capacity of the entire population, will enable—to mutual benefit—the purchase of manufactured industrial goods that the Motherland can supply.

To these causes for concern must be added two others, both of a general nature, even though one related to Mussolini's economic and social policy and the other to his foreign policy.

On the economic and social front, the "master plan" for the Italian economy announced by the Duce on March 23, 1936, had, in fact, provoked reactions in the economic and, above all, industrial sectors that were generally far from positive, even though it had been officially hailed as a historic event.

Even before that, quite a few industrialists had shown—as reported in Rome by Gazzotti, the Fascist federal secretary from Turin—"alarm," "concern," and "fears" about the future. After Mussolini's speech, other fears were added to these, particularly those regarding the increased emphasis on social policies that were supposed to characterize the new course of Fascist politics, the insistence with which the Duce had spoken of the need for the state, through the Corporations, to control and regulate the economy; the special role assigned to the IRI, which was highly unlikely to align with their desires and demands for its dismantling; and, finally, concerns regarding the announced shift toward autarky.

Finally, on the foreign policy front, the passage from Ettore Conti's diary that we cited at the beginning of this discussion regarding the attitude of the various segments of Italian society immediately after the end of the war in Ethiopia is emblematic. However serious they may have been, none of the concerns plaguing the Italian business community were actually sufficient to truly shake its confidence in Mussolini.

More than a decade of experience demonstrated that, albeit with some difficulties and a few superficial wounds, major issues could ultimately always be resolved to "mutual satisfaction" and, above all, without too much damage to the business community (and almost always with some "satisfactory" compensation). Now, however—just as many signs suggested that, despite everything, better times might be returning for the Italian economy—the picture of relations between the business community and the regime was beginning to be clouded by a new development, a sort of imponderable that could not fail to arouse, at least among the most astute and open-minded, unease and concern: What did Mussolini really want? Would he be content with the success he had achieved and truly align himself with a policy of peace alongside the other "satisfied" powers, or—intoxicated by success and increasingly convinced of his "infallibility"—would he once again set his sights on new and riskier adventures?

This question, after all, was not asked only by the business community. It is no exaggeration to say that all Italians asked it, albeit with different feelings and hopes. Not infrequently, they went so far as to write to him directly to praise him, profess their love and devotion, offer advice and suggestions, and report situations that needed correction or "undeserving" individuals who should be punished, and so on. (The relevant documentation preserved among the papers of his private secretariat is quite extensive and of considerable importance for assessing and understanding the prestige Mussolini enjoyed and the manifestations and nature of that prestige, especially at the grassroots level.) In some cases, people even turned to astrology in hopes of receiving a response.

And, on a completely different level, virtually all the major foreign ministries were also paying close attention to him, not to mention the international press, which in the second half of 1936 was filled—as never before or since—with articles of every kind about Mussolini and his future policies.

A dispatch from Ambassador De Chambrun to Flandin dated May 10 clearly highlights the issue—ultimately more human than political—around which most of these questions revolved: "To what extent can the head of government allow himself to be led by dreams of grandeur, the dangers of which his lucidity and insight should surely reveal to him?"

Which, on closer inspection, is the very same point from which—later, when Mussolini's rise was in its downward phase, and even afterward, once the cycle had tragically come to an end—a widely circulated judgmental phrase would emerge: "If only he had stopped after the empire…"

Translated into political terms and applied to the Fascist ruling class, this question took on a range of meanings, some already clear, others that would become clear later.

The first and ultimately decisive implication—and one over which divisions within Fascism were now beginning to become sharp, even though the pro-Germans were still clearly in the minority and divided into two groups, the outright pro-Nazis and the die-hard Anglophobes—was obviously that connected to the regime's future foreign policy and, in particular, what the next relations would be, on the one hand, withEngland on the one hand and with Germany on the other—given that by then the dilemma

was becoming increasingly evident and less and less avoidable, even though, despite the Ethiopian affair, it was still an open dilemma, that is, one that could be resolved one way or the other. Thus, the real problem was whether Mussolini realized (and was capable of acting accordingly) that—despite the great success achieved—that was nothing more than his "fifteen minutes of fame," that is, a particularly favorable moment for him, which, however, would be difficult and above all risky to think of perpetuating and which, therefore, had to be exploited with cold realism, without being carried away by absurd dreams of further successes or by equally absurd grudges, but, on the contrary, taking into account only the actual national interests and the country's need for a period of peace and work as long as possible.

The events of the following years—namely, the fact that Mussolini ended up drawing ever closer to Hitler (toward whom, as Ambassador Cerruti told Blum as late as early January 1937, he harbored "a sort of insurmountable repulsion"), to ally with him and follow him into war, should not lead one to believe that this dilemma was, in the aftermath of the conquest of Ethiopia, merely theoretical and, in fact, already objectively resolved, predetermined in Germany's favor.

On the contrary, during the months in question and for quite some time afterward (even though, undoubtedly, the more time passed, the narrower the scope of choice became), it was a real possibility not only subjectively (for Mussolini) but, more importantly, objectively (that is, compared to the likelihood that Italy would return to the "Stresa Front").

The fact that the British Conservative government was willing to reconcile with Mussolini is beyond dispute. Nor were the difficulties standing in the way of a reconciliation insurmountable, whether in terms of the balance of power within the Conservative majority or in terms of the role the Duce would have had to play to facilitate the operation and help the British government "save face" as much as possible. As for the French government, even without wishing to cast doubt on the programmatic and ideological anti-fascism of the various components of the Popular Front, it is a fact that Paris could not completely dissociate itself from London (much less entrust its fate solely to an alliance with Moscow), so if England had reconciled with Italy, Paris would have had to "swallow the bitter pill" whether it liked it or not, in the name of its own national security, the defense of its friends in Central and Southeastern Europe, and, perhaps, the reconciliation of some of its domestic opponents. Nor, on closer inspection, was the situation much different in the realm of public opinion.

There is no doubt that the war in Ethiopia had cost fascism much of its support throughout most of the world. In all democratic countries in 1935 and 1936, the invasion of Ethiopia had sparked deep divisions in public opinion. And while there were certainly voices that had approved of or at least justified Mussolini, a far greater number had risen up against him—due both to a spontaneous moral and political reaction, to the actions taken by anti-fascist, liberal, and left-wing forces, and to the stance taken by much of the news media.

Traditional pacifist and civil rights organizations had mobilized everywhere. The same was true of many religious organizations—Catholic, Jewish, and especially Protestant. In many countries, committees and associations had been formed to aid Ethiopia and support the sanctions. In some ports, particularly in the United States, workers had attempted to organize a boycott of ships bound for Italy. According to press reports at the time, more than 15,000 people had volunteered to go and fight alongside the Ethiopians (though it appears that none actually left).

In the United States, there had been a widespread mobilization in support of Ethiopia among Black Americans, which not infrequently led to violent incidents with Italian Americans. And a notable surge

of anti-Italian sentiment had emerged among people of color in France and England as well, while the war had resonated significantly in Arab countries and among the emerging elites of African nations.

The country where hostility toward Italy had been strongest and had taken on a more distinctly anti-fascist character was perhaps France, where the Italian anti-fascist émigré community was most present and active and where, above all, the political leadership of the unrest had been assumed by the political forces of the left and far left, as well as by Freemasonry.

France, however, had also been the country where the Ethiopian affair had sparked the greatest divisions and, combined with the domestic political crisis that had brought the Popular Front to power, had produced the sharpest contrasts. And not only between anti-fascists and fascists or pro-fascists, but also—and, we might say, especially—between the left and the moderate right, between socialists and anti-socialists, between pacifists and nationalists; precisely those nationalists who had in the past been most hostile toward Italy, but who, faced with the threat of German revanchism, now could not forgive England for taking an uncompromising stance toward Mussolini and, moreover, for simultaneously flirting with Hitler (the Anglo-German naval agreement had been decisive in this regard); Emblematic in this regard is Tardieu's evolution, just as the "war of manifestos" that raged in October 1935 over the issue of sanctions was extremely significant: for the proponents of sanctions, the issue was to enforce "respect for international law" and its validity for all human races; for the anti-sanctionists (among the signatories of their manifesto were—as, indeed, among those who signed their opponents' manifesto—many of the most distinguished figures in French culture of the time), the goal was to prevent a "fratricidal conflict," which would have been not only "a crime against peace, but an attack on Western civilization" and, ultimately, "suicide".

The sheer scale of the negative reactions sparked among the public in democratic countries by the war in Ethiopia should not, however, lead to hasty and one-sided conclusions. While there is no doubt that a significant portion of these negative reactions took the form of a conscious anti-fascism that would never fade, in order to truly understand and assess the actual attitude of international public opinion—and in particular that of the major democratic countries of interest to us here—in the aftermath of the war's end, we must also recognize that for another, equally significant portion (especially in certain countries) of these reactions, the motivations—and above all, the outcomes—were different.

First of all—as Diggins astutely noted regarding the United States, though the argument can be extended to other countries as well—it is necessary to realize that in many cases the war in Ethiopia revealed to international public opinion, which was outraged by it, the warmongering face of Fascist Italy and Mussolini, erasing the peaceful image that public opinion had often formed of them in previous years; but this same public opinion did not link this new face to the nature of fascism, so that while its pacifist sensibilities were wounded, it did not, for this reason, become truly anti-fascist; ultimately, it effectively limited itself to viewing Italy as an imperialist power… just like the others. For, in fact, the sensibilities of the masses were disturbed more by the fear of war than by fascism itself.

Thus, once the war was over, indignation remained over the aggression perpetrated by Mussolini, but, ultimately, this was partly pushed into the background by the realization that the war was, in fact, over, without causing further upheaval.

An even more crucial factor preventing many from adopting a conscious anti-fascist stance was the fact that, in previous years, Mussolini and fascism had proven to be decidedly anti-Nazi and that, despite everything, there was still no real collaboration between the two regimes.

Hence, for some, the impossibility of viewing them as fundamentally similar—and even the hope that Mussolini (whose victory in Ethiopia, moreover, had enhanced his military prestige) might continue to be, as in 1934, the policeman who kept Hitler at bay and collaborated with the democratic powers in this task. Symptomatic of this is the fact that an opinion poll conducted in the United States in the fall of ’35—when anti-Italian sentiment and negative reactions were at their peak—to gauge Americans’ feelings toward other countries, ranked Germany first among the most unpopular nations (17.3%) and placed Italy only in third place (with 6.7%, behind even Japan (11.2%)).

And for the United States, Germany was certainly a far less imminent threat than it was for European countries. Not to mention all those other people—less naive or more realistic, depending on one’s point of view—who, having a clearer grasp of reality, reasoned that, ultimately, it was better not to burn bridges with Mussolini, even at the cost of having to pay him a price they found repugnant, just to prevent him from hearing “the call of the wild” and allying himself with Hitler. This was precisely the reasoning put forward, in connection with the Laval-Hoare Plan, by men hostile to Mussolini’s claims on Ethiopia, such as W. Lippmann and A. Nevins, who had justified the plan with two arguments: that it was the only means of avoiding the risk of complications and, above all, of keeping the Duce away from Hitler.

The influence these arguments had on public opinion—and, as we have just seen, on a significant portion of the democratic elites as well—is often difficult for us to grasp today. At the time, however, it was quite strong, so much so that in March 1936, C. Rosselli had let slip this despondent statement: “The ideal scenario for us would be for Italian Fascism and German National Socialism to proceed united….”

Given these circumstances, it is impossible to claim that the war in Ethiopia—despite the decline in sympathy and the hostility toward Italy and Mussolini that it provoked—had fostered, at the level of public opinion, a genuine, widespread anti-fascist consciousness capable of truly influencing international politics. This would only come about much later, following Italy’s massive intervention in Spain and, above all (though still not to a decisive extent), after the signing of the “Pact of Steel.” For the time being—except, we repeat, among the left and in fairly limited liberal and intellectual circles—what had changed most of all was the judgment passed on Mussolini and Fascist Italy: less benevolent, less tinged with condescension, less “colorful,” more concerned, and, at most, more respectful.

Certain aspects of Mussolini’s behavior were still a source of irony and more or less risqué jokes; on the whole, however, few felt inclined to regard him merely as a “carnival Caesar”—a typical product of a provincial Italy that was playing at being a great power. For most, at least at the decision-making level, he was now a man who, rightly or wrongly, posed a problem for Europe and its future. He was a man who was difficult to trust and whose sense of responsibility one could and should doubt, but one had to reckon with him, given that his friendship or hostility could be a significant factor—in some cases perhaps even decisive—albeit certainly costly.

Many French people held this view in particular; although they were neither fascists nor pro-fascists, they saw in Mussolini a potential ally whom, despite everything, France could not afford to lose.

Truly indicative in this regard is what a liberal nationalist like Henri de Kerillis would write as late as the end of December 1936:

Italy will not commit itself any further. For the simple reason that its political principle is to keep its hands free… No power has practiced the policy of "sacred egoism" as freely as Italy. And we will not be the ones to blame it for that. Mussolini is torn between two desires: to prevent the triumph of Pan-Germanism and to benefit from the vast territorial realignment that would follow a major war.

If he were to emerge victorious alongside Germany, Mussolini would run the risk of literally succumbing under the weight of German power, which would have grown tremendously. But he would immediately benefit from a share of France's spoils—namely, Corsica, Nice, Tunisia, and Algeria. This is a possibility he does not rule out.

If victorious against Germany, Mussolini would make his country one of the greatest nations in Europe and would claim as his share of the spoils control over the Danube, the Balkans, and the Eastern Mediterranean. This is a possibility he does not rule out either.

The only possibility that the Duce's ultra-realist policy rejects is that of being on the side of the vanquished. And this means that he will retain, until the very end, the ability to choose the side on which to fight…

In Central Europe, Mussolini, driven by circumstances, has had to cede certain positions to Germany. It would be inaccurate to conclude from this that the Italian-German dispute has been resolved or eliminated. Mussolini is not the kind of man to remain silent in the face of an Anschluss. Mussolini perhaps has a greater sense of European balance than we do. He knows, just as well as we do, that a Germany in control of the East would tend to crush Italy just as it would tend to annihilate France.

Italy, on the other hand—barring any colossal mistakes on the part of the British—will never definitively join a bloc hostile to Great Britain. On this point, we must avoid being misled by overly hasty conclusions that might be drawn from the war in Ethiopia. Certainly! Italian resentment toward England, the leader of the League of Nations, has been very strong, and it is not wrong to think that it still persists among the people. But Mussolini, that staunch realist, is not one to be swept away by the uncontrolled sentiments of his masses. He has undoubtedly reflected more deeply and at greater length than anyone else on the circumstances of his magnificent victory. He defeated England because he outmaneuvered it and because he acted decisively against a nation with slow reflexes and, moreover, one that was militarily weakened. But he is well aware that, in an armed conflict, England would ultimately prevail thanks to all the strategic and economic advantages that allow it to "withstand heavy blows without being knocked out and to hold out longer than its rival." It is no coincidence that Mussolini has reflected on the history of Bonaparte.

“Fascist bloc,” “anti-fascist bloc”—these are mere words, or rather pretexts. Only Hitlerian imperialism, on the one hand, and the delusions of certain foolish French democrats, on the other, dream of turning them into reality. But all the others who look beneath the surface understand what lies behind these ambitious projects. Until further notice, countries act in their own interests, and the myths that great leaders of nations set in motion are nothing more, on the political level, than servants of imperialism who find it more convenient not to admit that they are such.

But let us return to the other issues that characterized, within the fascist ruling class, what we have defined as the question it was asking itself regarding Mussolini’s intentions for the immediate future—that is, the issues concerning the internal workings of the regime.

While the war in Ethiopia opened a new and decisive phase in the international history of Fascist Italy, everyone—to a greater or lesser extent—realized that, on the domestic front as well, it constituted—or at least could have constituted—an equally decisive moment. Mussolini’s personal prestige—and, by extension, that of Fascism—was in fact so high that many things which in previous years would have been unthinkable were now, or seemed to be, achievable.

We have already discussed the demands and social expectations for a new and more concrete “corporate era,” and, moreover, one need only leaf through the fascist newspapers and magazines of those months to realize not only how vivid these expectations were, but also how they were expressed: on the one hand, by interpreting the “master plan” for the Italian economy announced by Mussolini on March 23; on the other hand, by attempting to frame the discourse in broader terms under the guise of developing the “new economy of the Empire.”

Other questions and expectations, however, either did not surface at all or emerged only in a very indirect manner. Among the former, the most significant was the one concerning the monarchy. No one knew what Mussolini’s true attitude toward the monarchy was. The most candid explanation he had given for why Fascism was “monarchist,” however, was perhaps that it had identified with the monarchy “for contingent historical reasons and for practical reasons”; the House of Savoy had played a significant role in national history, especially during the Risorgimento, and in some regions the monarchical tradition had been kept alive: “therefore, the monarchy is a powerful factor in Italian national unity that it would be folly to reject; because ‘… the unity of the nation is a fundamental principle of Fascism. That is why we Italians are monarchists.’”

But Mussolini had delivered this speech in 1925, at a very difficult time for him and his power, when the monarchy’s endorsement was indispensable to him. Now the situation was entirely different, and one might believe that the true factor of national unity was now Mussolini himself.

Hence, for some older Fascists who had always remained republicans at heart—and even for some of the younger ones—the idea arose that this was finally the right moment to rid themselves of the now useless and cumbersome institution of the monarchy. What sense did it make, in fact, to continue keeping a king who no longer contributed anything of importance to the regime, who ended up being the sole point of reference and intrigue for the last few men of the “old regime,” who reaped glory and titles he certainly hadn’t earned himself—and here the discourse on the monarchy converged with

what, whether sincerely or ambitiously—it matters little— many were already considering the moment when the question of Mussolini's succession would arise—he would inevitably have a say when, after the Duce had retired or, worse, died, a choice had to be made as to who would take his place?

For many, however, the even more pressing question concerned the very nature of the regime. Did the unity and resolve demonstrated by the Italians during the war, Mussolini's personal prestige, and the now nearly complete disappearance of significant groups of internal opponents not mean that the regime could loosen its grip and become more liberal?

This demand was particularly strong among the party's intellectuals and the younger generation, some of whom made no secret of it.

G. Artieri, for example, recalled in a piece dedicated to his participation in the war in Africa as a military journalist this characteristic episode that took place in Addis Ababa shortly before G. Ciano returned to Italy:

He was our minister, and he gathered us at the Hotel Imperiale… He asked us, both individually and as a group, what our opinion was on the undertaking and whether we agreed that it had been brought about by the will and efforts of the entire Italian nation… We were all there, gathered around him—war correspondents for Italian newspapers (Aldo Borelli, Giovanni Ansaldo, Paolo Caccia Dominioni, and, I believe, Alessandrini, now an ambassador; Raffaele Casertano, who had been in Asmara as head of the press office; and others). Everyone had their say, but overall a strongly and curiously liberal sentiment emerged. Yes, almost all of us said yes. It is Italy that has won. Let the Duce reward the whole of Italy by granting it the civil liberties it deserves.

On a more strictly political level, this state of mind—this demand for a liberalization of the regime—translated in the second half of 1936 into a certain loosening of some restrictions and the authorization of certain initiatives and acts of tolerance that would have been unthinkable in other times (to give a few examples: some journalists who had been struck from the register were readmitted; M. Missiroli was finally able to sign his articles in influential magazines as well; Bombacci was authorized to publish his own magazine, etc.), which, while on the one hand aroused approval and hope, on the other hand also met with considerable hostility, especially among the older Fascists who were more influenced by a certain mindset and long-standing hatreds, and who feared that all this might foreshadow or actually lead to their own marginalization. And on a higher level, this need for liberalization translated into certain maneuvers and cautious probing of Mussolini regarding the future of the Fascist Party.

Now that the spiritual unity of the Italian people had been restored, did it still make sense to keep the PNF alive? Or, at the very least, shouldn't its character be changed—making it more voluntary, more of a militia-mission, and at the same time more democratic—by abandoning the system of hierarchies appointed from above in favor of one where they are elected (either entirely or up to a certain level) from below?

Supporters of the first solution, it seems, were quite few; those in favor of the second, on the other hand, were more numerous.

According to Acerbo's memoirs, both solutions must, for a moment, have been considered by Mussolini, who—while waiting to make a decision—reportedly even ensured that Starace, who was fiercely opposed to any liberalization and—however detested—served as a point of reference for all those who, out of conviction or personal interest, were opposed to any change, remained in Ethiopia as long as possible and, thus, out of a position to maneuver to prevent any positive decision on his part. In the end, however, he decided to abandon both.

An explanation for this decision can certainly be found in his conviction that the first solution would have met with strong opposition from much of the party establishment—from all those who, in the words of the head of the OVRA, G. Leto—boasting of old and new merits and posing as the architects of the recent African victory—"wished to enjoy its fruits with a sectarian and exclusivist spirit" and were working tenaciously to prevent the introduction of new elements into the inner circle of power and to avoid losing the share of it they had secured for themselves.

Another explanation—applicable to the second of the two solutions under consideration—is almost certainly to be found in the debate—coded, but no less lively for that—that had flared up as soon as news leaked that something was "brewing."

One need only consider the insistence with which the leading Fascist journals (a typical example being *Critica fascista*) had begun discussing the party, its function, and its problems—and had continued to do so even after Mussolini's personal journal, *Gerarchia*, had published a note in August that served as a clear warning against continuing to harbor absurd hopes for a transformation of the PNF.

In fact, after lavish praise for the party's contribution to the victory in Ethiopia, the note stated:

The PNF—always in step with current events—did not require any special measures to maintain an effective presence during the months of combat and sanctions, nor does it feel the need today to alter the terms of its program or, in any case, to lay down the arms of its militant organization.

In short, once again, Mussolini's hostility toward the party and his fear of anything that might in any way disrupt the regime's monolithic nature—or even merely give the impression that it was less totalitarian than it appeared—must have prevailed. Unable and unwilling to displease too many party leaders and upset too many interests—as would have happened had he abolished the PNF—he did not, however, want to run the risk of either returning to the days of controversy between revisionists and hardliners or of reinvigorating the party, after having done so much to weaken it and reduce it to just one of the regime's many components.

Finally, one cannot underestimate another explanation, of a much more general nature, which has its roots in the very psychological state in which Mussolini found himself immediately after the end of the Ethiopian campaign.

An explanation that places his decision to maintain the status quo within the party in a much broader perspective.

Once the war in Ethiopia was over, Rachele Mussolini tried in vain—probably also capitalizing on the pain and despair caused in him by the severe form of infantile paralysis that had struck little Anna Maria, putting her very life in danger—to convince her husband to end his political career there and retire to private life: “Let’s call it quits; we’ve had more than enough luck. Let’s go to La Rocca”; “Your political mission may be over: think a little about yourself and your family, too.”

According to his wife’s memoirs, Mussolini’s response to these pleas was: “No,… we must always keep moving forward. I feel there is still much to be done, especially in the social sphere and to secure our achievements. You take care of the home.”

Although not very different, the explanation that Mussolini himself gave in the summer of 1943 to Carabinieri Deputy Brigadier Giuseppe Accetta at Campo Imperatore, on the Gran Sasso—where he had been interned by the Badoglio government—seems to us perhaps more psychologically credible. To Accetta—with whom he sometimes conversed to pass the time and who had told him—echoing what, as we have seen, was then a common sentiment among many Italians—that if, after conquering the empire, he had withdrawn from government or avoided another war, “he would have gone down in history as one of the great benefactors of the Italian people,” he replied that “the love of greatness and the sense of progress are inherent in every man.”

Both explanations are plausible. Psychologically speaking, however, the second one seems to us to better highlight the element of the love of greatness, which, in our view, must have been the prevailing factor, even if—as we shall see—not the only one. All the more so because, while there is no doubt that Mussolini had always held himself in high regard and had extreme confidence in his political acumen and abilities, there is ample evidence that the success achieved in the Ethiopian War had increased these even further and given him a new sense of self-assurance. Certain statements he made during politically non-committal interviews given in the weeks following the victory in Ethiopia are indicative in this regard; they reveal a sense of confidence—somewhere between fatalistic and predestined—that had never before been so pronounced, exposed, or even flaunted, with personal references that often went back as far as his childhood.

A typical example is the interview he gave to Phayre on May 10, which Phayre published in *Current History* in January 1937 and, in abridged form, in various European and American newspapers and magazines. In it, alongside his typical statements—which he had already made, for example, to Ludwig (albeit in somewhat less drastic terms)—such as this one:

it takes music and flags to stir up enthusiasm. The crowd is disorganized and scattered like a herd of animals until it is disciplined and guided. It does not need to know; but faith—which moves mountains—must spring from the orator’s soul and flow into that of the crowd, and the radio, which can stir the world with a grand idea. Truly, the tendency of our modern men to believe is… absolutely incredible!

There are a number of other stories about his “fateful star,” his “instinct” for political events, and his confidence that he will emerge unscathed from all trials and dangers, even those of a personal nature:

My enemies—and there are some both far and near—believe that the only way to destroy fascism is to kill its Duce. However, as a soldier, I must be ready to take any risk. Besides, I feel something inside me that rejoices when things of this sort happen. Living dangerously is my glory. Therefore, though bullets and bombs have whizzed past me without hitting me, I am convinced that I will die in my bed once my work for a greater Italy is complete.

Equally indicative of his state of mind are the irritation and anger he felt upon learning that someone—even among his most loyal followers— dared to criticize some of his actions or initiatives or, worse, did not share the official assessments regarding the new horizons that the Ethiopian victory had opened up for Fascist Italy and the decisive role that Italy had thereby definitively acquired in international politics. A small episode may serve as an example in this regard as well.

On May 25, through a note from an informant forwarded to him by the party, Mussolini learned that, during a lecture at the University of Rome, Gioacchino Volpe had not only criticized the excessive polemical force with which Fascism condemned the pre-Fascist regime, but had even, while speaking of the Ethiopian victory, said: “There is no doubt that today is Mussolini’s moment.”

Reading the report and flying into a rage were one and the same; a note preserved in his secretariat’s files speaks volumes: “I’ve never liked him. I put up with him for the sake of his seven children. Cold, dull, anti-fascist. Send it to De Vecchi, telling him where it came from and asking when he’s retiring.”

From a human perspective, this emphasis on an already so pronounced aspect of Mussolini’s personality is certainly no surprise. Few men of his background and upbringing would have possessed the inner strength and self-awareness necessary to avoid letting such a great success go to their heads. Nor should we underestimate the fact that the entire environment around him contributed to exalting him and bolstering his sense of self-confidence: the enthusiasm of the people, the hyperbolic praise of the press—which was very often even more servile and excessively rhetorical than what was demanded of it from above—the constant flattery and adulation directed at him by nearly all of his collaborators, and, not least, the tone of the foreign press itself. And not only the press favorable to him, but also the more serious and responsible outlets, which—while certainly not concealing the gravity of the moment or the dangers inherent in Mussolini’s policies—could not help but cater to the new wave of curiosity, interest, and gossip about the Duce sparked among their readers by the Ethiopian affair; consequently, they were overflowing with articles about him, his life, his ideas, etc.

And, to some extent, even the attitude of his own opponents, who not infrequently resorted to such hyperbole in attacking him that they, too, ended up contributing to his image as an exceptional man. Consider the case of the Dean of Winchester who, during a service in the presence of the Negus, reportedly went so far as to say that “the Italian people have been invaded by a malevolent spirit of superhuman nature… And the man who rules Italy believes himself to be a Caesar, but he is the true

embodiment of the Assyrian emperor Antiochus, known as ‘the Brilliant’ and nicknamed ‘the Mad.’”

And finally, one last point to consider: among those who openly expressed their admiration for him were often men who were anything but ordinary—renowned intellectuals, leading financiers, and military figures with distinguished careers.

Extremely important from a human and psychological standpoint—and for the implications it would have on his political actions—this heightened confidence in himself and in the strength of his power also had an almost immediate and growing impact on the way Mussolini directed the machinery of the regime.

With the conclusion of the war in Ethiopia, in fact, his interest increasingly focused on matters of a general nature and, above all, on foreign policy. Day-to-day affairs—domestic politics in particular—gradually lost more and more of their appeal for him. Now convinced that Fascism had achieved the unity of the Italian people and that, in any case, his personal prestige was both the guarantee and the decisive factor in popular support for the regime, domestic politics not only lost its appeal for him, but he also began to take less and less personal interest in it, leaving it increasingly in the hands of Buffarini-Guidi, Bocchini, Starace, and, in a whole range of matters, his private secretariat.

An examination of the papers and documents he reviewed from this point onward is revealing in this regard: their number decreased significantly and progressively, and with it the number of his annotations on them, as if he were reading them more quickly, with less effort, more out of a sense of official duty than out of a desire to check everything and know everything, as he had in the past. This, however, should not lead one to believe that this was accompanied by greater trust and regard for his collaborators; on the contrary, these—if possible—diminished even further.

It was simply that, by now, he was convinced that the harm they could cause was less, given the regime’s greater stability, and he therefore generally limited himself to monitoring not so much their day-to-day political activities as their general conduct and private lives, so as to always keep them under his control and, if necessary, know how and where to strike them.

In his memoirs, Bastianini accurately captured certain aspects of Mussolini’s new psychological state and their impact on his conception of politics:

Every human existence needs comfort and consolation, but that of extraordinary men thirsts for many other things that they are loath to ask for.

In those small rooms at Villa Torlonia that serve as Mussolini’s home, his mind finds no rest, his spirit finds no peace, and his soul does not open up because he disdains to express himself; on the contrary, he reacts with a silent rage that hardens the harshness of his character and exacerbates the flaw that weighs most heavily on him—that of being so lofty as to appear contemptuous. As his inner imbalances fatally intensify, the man who holds Italy in his hands withdraws ever more into himself with the haughtiness of a Stoic and the arrogance of a cynic—for no one, he believes, could understand him thoroughly—and because opening up completely to his collaborators, up there in that austere palace where he is everything and does not wish to be first among equals, would be a weakness unworthy of

him and detrimental to his role.

He may not realize that this inner torment is influencing his actions, but in the meantime, reality becomes distorted in his eyes; every obstacle begins to appear to him as a personal affront, and the outside world seems like a jumble of hostile forces not to be reconciled but to be crushed. Thus, the passion of the statesman—who seeks success by harmonizing discordant elements—fades within him, and instead, blind faith in his own instincts, sudden decisions, and a delight in thwarting anyone who attributes an intention to him take hold, driving him ever more toward improvisation.

He is no longer the man of the Four-Power Pact, of Stresa, of the agreements with France, Greece, and Turkey—the flexible and far-sighted negotiator who might be content merely to lay the groundwork upon which others will weave, who knows when, the fabric of history. Now he is convinced that the world must be taken by storm…

However, everything we have said about his growing love of grandeur is not enough on its own to explain why Mussolini did not accept his wife's exhortations to withdraw from political life. Above all, settling for this explanation prevents us from fully understanding and assessing an extremely important event in the history of the Fascist regime that immediately followed the conclusion of the war in Ethiopia: the appointment of Galeazzo Ciano as foreign minister.

The fact that Mussolini did not heed his wife's pleas does not mean that he did not believe that, in any case, sooner or later he would have to step down from the leadership of the regime. Nor can it be entirely ruled out that—despite his passion for power and grandeur—deep down he sometimes desired it. Although he was just over fifty and still played sports, his physical condition was no longer what it once was. The psychological strain of the past two years, in particular, had taken a heavy toll on him.

In presenting the interview Mussolini had granted him to his readers, Phayre accurately described both his physical appearance ("a heavily built, bald man who is gaining weight despite the diet he's on… nearsighted") and certain aspects of his innermost personality: "Mussolini is a sad, solitary figure; despite all his glory," who could not adapt to "feeling confined" (hence his passion for flying, motorcycle and car racing, and skiing) and who, despite his conviction that he would die in his own bed, was "absolutely opposed to any discussion of death, even the faintest hint of it," to the point that, if anyone brought it up, he would immediately change the subject.

This particular aspect of his human condition may perhaps explain why it was precisely around October 1936 that his relationship with Petacci began to take shape and become an important part of his life, unlike any of his previous relationships. It certainly explains why he might have considered retiring to private life, even going so far as to mention it to one of the very few people in whom he placed his trust and to whom, on extremely rare occasions, he opened a window into his soul: Costanzo Ciano.

“Immediately after the proclamation of the Empire,” Acerbo wrote, “he told Costanzo Ciano one day that he would astonish the world by following the example of Sulla, and just as Sulla, once the republic’s order had been restored, had withdrawn for the rest of his days, he, after having restored civic harmony and inner peace to his citizens, and having revived the national spirit and strengthened the country’s economy, would retire to private life to allow the forces he had fostered and stimulated to unfold freely, emancipated from any guardianship on his part.

Withdrawing to private life, however, was by no means simple for Mussolini.

Even if we assume that, by drawing on a certain aspect of his personality, he could bring himself to make such a decision, it certainly could not be immediate—even though, just as certainly, that might have seemed the most appropriate moment to take such a step. Aside from the gravity of the international situation—tensions with England and the strained relations with France in mid-July, further complicated by the Spanish Civil War—which must have led a man like Mussolini to consider his active presence on the international stage, as the “steady helmsman” of Italian foreign policy, still absolutely indispensable, what made this step unfeasible for the time being was, in fact, a very specific and unavoidable problem: Who should take the helm of the regime? Who should be designated as his successor?

Within the old Fascist establishment, no one could have taken Mussolini’s place. Aside from the contempt he harbored for all potential candidates for succession (the only one he might, perhaps, have considered was Costanzo Ciano, but the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies was sixty years old, in poor health, politically little more than a local figurehead of the regime, and certainly not one of the most prominent Fascists in the country), a choice among them would have meant unleashing all sorts of jealousies, struggles, and grudges that would have sparked a myriad of centrifugal movements and paralyzed the regime—if not outright dismantled it.

Nor did the second generation of Fascists offer any figure of such prominence as to justify the risk of bypassing all the old guard, banking on the hope that—just to prevent one of the others from being preferred over themselves—they would accept a homo novus. And then, as usual, Mussolini had neither esteem nor trust for the second-generation Fascists either. Yet the issue of succession could not, as has been said, be ignored. It could be postponed, but not avoided. Even setting aside Mussolini’s decision on whether or not to retire to private life, the more time that passed, the more serious the issue would become—and, perhaps, the more decisive for the regime.

It is in this light that we must view and assess the significance of the cabinet reshuffle of June 11, 1936. With this reshuffle, Mussolini abolished three ministries he had headed in recent years: the Ministry of the Colonies, to which Lessona—until then an undersecretary—was promoted; the Ministry of Corporations, which was also entrusted to the incumbent undersecretary Ferruccio Lantini; and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was entrusted to Galeazzo Ciano. In Ciano’s place, D. Alfieri.

On the surface, it seemed partly to relieve the Duce of some of his many portfolios (he still retained the Ministry of the Interior and the three military ministries) and partly to promote two undersecretaries, Lessona and Alfieri, who had particularly distinguished themselves during the war for their dynamism and efficiency. The true significance of the reshuffle, however, lay elsewhere and consisted in the appointment of Galeazzo Ciano to the Foreign Ministry; the rest of the move was merely a smokescreen.

With this appointment, Mussolini had effectively chosen his successor and begun to pave the way for

him. Since he did not truly hold anyone in high regard or trust anyone, and since he could not make a political choice among the regime's leading figures, he had decided to groom his own successor, choosing a young man—the son of one of the very few people he trusted (and who could therefore influence him)—and, above all, the husband of his daughter, a man who was intelligent but lacked a strong personality of his own (so that Mussolini could mold him as he wished), essentially a stranger to the regime's inner circles and who, in Ethiopia as an air force officer, had demonstrated courage (which, in the fascist mindset, was no trivial matter); and, to pave the way for him and establish his standing both at home and abroad, he had entrusted him with what he considered the most prestigious and important ministry—one which, in essence, he would in any case have continued to oversee personally behind his son-in-law's back, so as to guide him with his "steady hand" and thereby make the new minister a faithful executor of his policies.

Mussolini—as has been noted—had little understanding of the individual, particularly those not of his own generation or background. As a mentor, moreover, he possessed neither the ability nor the experience, and he was inclined to view the individual much as he viewed the masses: as an inert object to be molded by his own "artistic" hands. Given these circumstances, the choice of Ciano proved to be a complete mistake.

Ciano, as has been noted, was a young man (when he was appointed foreign minister, he had just turned thirty-three)—intelligent, not lacking a certain literary culture and a certain open-mindedness—which, at the very beginning, had led him to toy with the idea of pursuing journalism and, later, had led him to form friendships more with writers and journalists (including those not exactly held in high esteem by the Fascists or who had fallen from grace, such as Malaparte) than with the regime's political establishment (among whom there were certainly those who had not forgotten his lack of Fascist zeal in his early years).

As for his character, he was essentially indecisive, frivolous, lacking in moral compass, and prone to relying heavily on his cunning—which was, in reality, more imagined than real. His diplomatic experience was limited. After entering the diplomatic service, he had served as vice-consul in Brazil and later as an attaché at the legation in Beijing; he returned to China after his marriage to Edda Mussolini, remaining there until 1933, when, upon his return to Italy, he was appointed by his father-in-law as head of his Press Office—the first step on the path that would lead him, in 1935, to become Minister of Press and Propaganda.

In Roman society, he had rekindled some of his old friendships, but above all, he had formed close ties with certain circles of the capital's aristocracy, who had made him something of their "enfant chéri." During the war in Africa, as commander of a bomber squadron, the "Disperata," he had behaved courageously and had been awarded two medals for valor. His political stance, however—both in Africa and in Italy during a period of sick leave—had not been appreciated by many of those who had had the opportunity to hear him speak. Fundamentally skeptical and pessimistic about the prospects of the Ethiopian campaign, he had in fact not failed—to quote Lessona—to sow "the poisonous seed of his skepticism with inconceivable recklessness."

"Military victory is out of the question," he had said, among other things, to Lessona himself when the latter had traveled to Africa, "because in this mountainous terrain there can be no quick solutions. Meanwhile, we will be strangled by sanctions. We must negotiate diplomatically with England, and immediately… I see dark clouds on the horizon."

And, relying both on certain officials at Palazzo Chigi and, above all, making use of the opportunities

afforded him by his ministry, he had waged a subtle campaign of criticism against Suvich, reproaching him for “failing to take advantage of the German card” to frighten the British and the French and induce them to change their attitude toward Italy.

Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Ciano’s appointment as foreign minister generally aroused surprise, astonishment, and no small amount of criticism, both in the upper echelons of the regime and throughout the country. As has been written, expressions such as “the most general,” “the predestined one,” “the son-in-law count,” “Italy’s second most important figure,” and “the upstart idiot” were on everyone’s lips. It was even said that he was “Edda’s moral kept man.” Old accusations of profiteering, illicit enrichment, and immoral conduct—which had already circulated in the past and resurfaced when he was first appointed minister the previous year—reemerged at virtually every level.

Nor did the choice of the new minister find favor abroad, where many foreign ministries were concerned, given that his inclination toward closer ties with Germany was well known; the simultaneous departure of Suvich from Palazzo Chigi (replaced by Bastianini) and the near-complete dispersal of the group of officials who had until then formed the backbone of the Foreign Ministry confirmed these concerns.

In reality, Ciano—while advocating, perhaps more out of personal ambition than conviction, a more dynamic policy toward Berlin—did not intend to overturn the now-classic policy of “decisive influence”; he merely wanted to make it more incisive and “astute,” so as to compel London and Paris to officially recognize the empire and to resume, on new terms, their former relations with Italy; nor, even if he had wanted to, would the Duce have allowed him to pursue a different course. And not only because Mussolini continued, behind his back, to chart the basic course of “grand foreign policy” himself, but because—at least in the early days—the new minister’s attitude toward his father-in-law was characterized by a mixture of veneration and awe, which left no room either for his own potential creativity and initiative, nor for the establishment of any form of intimacy or genuine collaboration with a man like Mussolini—reserved by nature and increasingly unable to step outside his role, his fatalism, and the shield of security and sophistry with which he was increasingly inclined to justify his own mistakes and to counter the arguments of those few—and his son-in-law was certainly not among them—who dared to contradict him.

As Bastianini recalls, having been close to Ciano at Palazzo Chigi for three years:

In Mussolini’s presence, and even when speaking to him on the phone, his demeanor was always that of a bureaucrat: chest out, eyes fixed straight ahead, firm and brief replies: “Yes, Duce!”

“I’ll take care of it right away, Duce!”

“Already taken care of, Duce!”

This attitude, this kind of relationship, explains why, when at a certain point the psychological subservience to the Duce began to wane, the possibility of a genuine understanding between the two men would also fade away for good, and in its place a mutual, bitter psychological unease, which would gradually transform into a sort of deep irritation and into dissatisfied, frustrating criticism—and for Mussolini, into a new source of human loneliness, of distrust in everyone, and of the self-conviction of his own irreplaceability and exceptionality.

In mid-1936, however, all this was still a distant and unforeseeable prospect, and Mussolini, despite everything, could believe that he had found for his empire, if not a second Duce—for such a possibility, already unthinkable in 1932, was now absurd to him—at least a heir apparent, chosen and designated by him. The watchword, the goal of those hard years—"to endure"—seemed to have become a reality.

END.

Appendix.

1. Telegrams from Mussolini to his daughter Edda in China (1930–31).

December 8, 1930.

Vittorio and Bruno received your letter, and of course I read it too; it amused me greatly, especially because of the traffic ticket. I thought you, too, had gone to the peace celebrations in Nanjing. The second issue of the children's magazine *La Penna dei ragazzi* has been published and has been a wild success. The entire national and even international press has covered it. I'll send you some very interesting clippings. Mom is feeling better, and if she decides to go to the high mountains—as unanimously recommended by her doctors—she'll recover sooner. Today we went to the classic Roma-Lazio match. A huge crowd, all rooting for Roma; the final score was one to one at Roma's home stadium, the Testaccio. As usual, I'm signing off with a hug—please give my regards to Galeazzo. Send us an album with views of Shanghai. Mussolini

January 5, 1931

We received your letters this morning, January 5, and I am replying to you.

Mom is doing better, and if you and Edda strictly order her to go to Merano, her recovery will be very quick. I won't say anything to her so as not to provoke a strictly opposite reaction. Tampussino is delightful, and Annamaria is very pretty. The boys' magazine *La Penna* is doing very well, with 200

subscribers so far and a good 1,500 copies printed weekly, and it's sent to you regularly. Overall, I'd say the general situation has improved since last year. I was even moved by the praise Galeazzo heaps on you to Rachele. Good—I approve. Vittorio has become a very serious young man since becoming the editor and founder of a printed newspaper. I'm sorry you weren't able to hear my New Year's speech in English. You'll hear me, however, in the Foxfilm. I'd like to know—perhaps with a telegram of just one word—whether my telegrams are reaching you with due speed. Affectionately, Mussolini

January 26, 1931.

Here's some news. Yesterday, the Italian national team sensationally defeated the French national team in Bologna, five to zero—I mean, zero. We followed the game on the radio and cheered like crazy. Mom has finally decided to leave for South Tyrol, where she'll make a full recovery. When you've seen my "Cinespeech," send a telegram; hugs to you and Galeazzo Mussolini

February 8, 1931.

Nothing new. A man who arrived in Rome with hostile intentions was arrested in time. None of this matters to me in the least. Mom is in Merano with Tampussino, where she's enjoying herself and rejuvenating in the sun and snow. Anna Maria goes to the beach when the weather is nice. I'm slogging away as usual—warmest hugs, Mussolini.

April 20, 1931.

Today I received the wonderful, long-awaited news that fills me with joy and stirs my emotions deeply. From now on, I will think of you even more intensely. Now I'll give you some news. A harsh winter from an economic standpoint is coming to an end, and the situation is improving. Things are generally going well at Villa Torlonia. Bruno and Vittorio are studying and have changed a great deal since I started having their principal send me a daily report on their conduct and academic performance. I believe they will pass to the next grade, and they'd love to come visit you as if nothing had happened. Publicly, our little Europe is always on the move, from the Manzanarre to the Rhine. I don't write you letters for the reason you know—namely, that they take too long. Guido or Giorgio are two simple, strong names. Give my regards to Galeazzo. I've read your entire letter carefully. Hugs, Mussolini.

June 11, 1931.

I'm writing to give you our news. Vittorio and Bruno passed their exams with good grades, which is why they've suspended *La penna dei ragazzi* and will be rewarded with an outboard motor to use in Riccione. Send the name to be given to the outboard motor. I had suggested "Fiammifero." I think that toward the end of the month everyone will go to Romagna and then to Riccione. I fell off a horse and had 15 days of a real pain in the neck. Morale is decent. All quiet on the Italian-Vatican front. Hugs to you, and many warm regards to Galeazzo Mussolini.

September 15, 1931.

I received your letter with the photographs of Ungen some time ago, which I showed to the two Japanese students who flew into Rome, and today I received a lovely letter from you containing many interesting things, such as the story of the poet from Tokyo who writes sonnets for the Empress. Nothing special here. As you probably already know, we've renewed our agreement with the Pope, and this has irritated those who wanted to capitalize on the rift. Day by day, we await the auspicious event with quiet anticipation. From the 20th to the 26th, I'll be going to Forlì to see the Rocca delle Camminate restored and to bring Vittorio and Bruno back to Rome because school starts on October 1st. You asked me for an oil portrait. You should know that the only passable portrait of me was painted by an artist using olive oil. So I cannot send it to you. Here in Italy, there is plenty of work, and when you return to Rome—which has already surpassed one million inhabitants—it will seem entirely new to you, or almost so. Give my regards to Galeazzo, and with best wishes, I embrace you, Mussolini.

2. The dissolution of the Anti-Fascist Concentration in Paris in a report by G. E. Modigliani (June 1934).

On June 2, Modigliani submitted the following report to the secretariat of the Second International; it is translated from German:

"Italian anti-fascism abroad is at a turning point in its history. The Anti-Fascist Concentration—that is, the coalition of anti-fascist parties and groups based in Paris—has been dissolved. Its newspaper, *La Libertà*, has ceased publication.

"I know better than anyone else that movements of political refugees have only potential value, and that it would be a betrayal of the truth to present them as so important as to promise immediate results. The movements—even illegal ones—that exist and operate within various countries are more effective. However, movements of political émigrés are, if nothing else, telltale signs of forces that are suppressed within a country but not completely eliminated. I therefore believe that what is unfolding within the ranks of Italian anti-fascists abroad deserves to be noted.

"The value of forming a coalition of left-wing parties and groups had already been recognized by Italian political refugees before the end of 1926, and the coalition was duly established. 'La Libertà' was founded in April 1927. Initially, the coalition included the Unitary Socialist Party (Socialist Workers' International), the Maximalist Socialist Party, the Republican Party, the General Confederation of Italian Labor, and the "LIDU." The latter brought together, in addition to a majority of socialists and republicans, the most prominent figures among the former leaders of Italian revolutionary syndicalism.

"An unspoken but certain continuation of the rapprochement among left-wing parties brought about in

Italy by the assassination of Matteotti, the Anti-Fascist Concentration strove, from the very beginning, to emphasize its character as a strongly democratic organization. This earned it the hostile opposition and struggle of the Communists, without securing the public support of those Italian émigrés who, though among the most outspoken anti-fascists, did not feel compelled to align themselves explicitly with left-wing political groups. As a result, the Concentration soon came to place at the forefront of its anti-fascist program the establishment, in Italy, of a republican regime open to all socialist achievements. These demands were considered impossible to achieve without the prior, totalitarian, and revolutionary overthrow of the Fascist regime. It must not be forgotten that both the formation of the anti-fascist coalition and its definitive orientation in the aforementioned direction occurred at a time when it was reasonable to believe that, under pressure from abroad and following the economic and financial collapse at home, the Italian Fascist regime could not hold out for long. As for me, I never subscribed to these optimistic predictions or the conclusions others drew from them, but it must be acknowledged that they seemed plausible both because of the catastrophic collapses that Fascist policies were causing within the very foundations of Italian capitalist enterprises and because of the scale of activity displayed, within the country, illegal groups were demonstrating within the country, and because, prior to 1932, one could believe that all of Europe—or nearly all of it—would eventually rise up against Benito Mussolini's shameful and dangerous dictatorship.

"And to complete this atmosphere of enthusiasm and hope, in July 1930 the socialists succeeded in restoring socialist unity; and at precisely this moment, the efforts of all those who viewed the struggle against Fascism as a return to freedom against all forms of dictatorship were reestablished and strengthened in Italy."

"For a time—and this was especially true in 1927 and 1928—it had been possible to believe that only the Communists would be capable of organizing an Italian anti-fascist movement within the country, and this was because socialists, Republicans, Liberals, and Radicals had been driven across the borders by the wave of terror at the end of 1926, before these parties had managed to establish an underground organization within the country. The Communists, on the other hand, with ample support from the "Comintern," had done so in 1925. But what the Socialists and Democrats were unable to do before their exile, they strove to accomplish afterward, and as early as 1929, the first results were already evident. I will not go into details; it is easy to understand why. I will not mention the names—etched in our hearts—of those who, as a result of their heroic conduct, were dragged before the Special Tribunal or sent to the cursed islands. To better understand the events that followed, one must bear in mind that, at first, this resumption of the anti-fascist struggle within the country was marked by the ideological orientation that inevitably prevails in movements driven more by individual abilities than by the efforts of the masses—an ideology that is easier to adopt when working, in the catacombs, for the rebirth of political action among the oppressed. This meant that, following the particularly heroic efforts of the pioneers and the first high-profile convictions, contacts were established and clandestine propaganda could be organized within the country. Thus, as early as 1930, an illegal movement with a distinctive character emerged. Socialists predominated numerically within it. But the economic determinism of their doctrine and the class-based directives that followed from it led to the emergence within the movement of new clandestine groups with a preference for individual initiatives—a trait characteristic of the mindset of the middle-class intellectuals who dominated these groups. This leads us to many other movements that socialism encountered almost everywhere in the nineteenth century. It should come as no surprise that the rebels themselves began to adopt the principles and methods of the past. And it is certainly no mere coincidence that this revival, within Italy, of the spirit of socialist struggle and political liberation is taking place under the very same slogan, "Justice and Freedom"—the socialist organizations that emerged in southern Italy 70 years ago under the chaotic yet effective impetus of Mikhail Bakunin. Be that as it may, and while such considerations cannot detract from the

importance of the establishment of “Justice and Freedom” groups within the country, the fact remains that they easily and quickly established ties between the unified Socialist Party and “G. L.,” especially since such an alliance fit perfectly with the optimism, regarding the possibility of overthrowing the Mussolini regime, that still prevailed among the ranks of the Italian political émigré community.

“To tell the truth, the agreement with ‘G. L.’” did not arouse the same enthusiasm among the members of the “Anti-Fascist Concentration”; especially among traditionalist republicans, opposition began to take shape, provoking a profound crisis within the Republican Party abroad. But in the end, in 1932, GL delegates definitively and completely distanced themselves from the Concentration’s directives, all the more so because, toward the end of 1932, the “Concentration” unanimously emphasized and clarified its adherence to the emancipatory and constructive principles of social democracy.

“As will be seen, these predictions did not come to pass, but before commenting on this fiasco, it is worth noting what the ‘Concentration’ had managed to accomplish up to that point.

“The weekly *Libertà* had reached a circulation of 20,000 copies in 1931–32. The smuggling of underground publications into Italy was yielding results. None of the emissaries of the political emigration who had reached the interior of the country suffered the fate of our heroic Pertini (arrested in Pisa and sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment). Thanks especially to the efforts of socialist organizations abroad, tangible evidence of solidarity from Italians scattered throughout the world was demonstrated through a very large influx of contributions. The annual budget of the “Concentrazione” rose from 312,000 francs in 1928 to 383,000 in 1929; to 478,000 in 1930, to 495,000 in 1931, before leveling off at 383,000 francs in 1932—and this despite the global economic crisis, which was depleting the resources of Italian emigrants everywhere—in America no less than in Europe. But more than the economic crisis, a new international situation in Europe was taking shape, characterized by Hitler’s coup in Germany and the papal and fascist coup in Austria. And as was to be expected, Italian anti-fascism had little to celebrate in these upheavals, since—there is no point in hiding it—they helped the Mussolini regime both to strengthen its grip at home and to mitigate hostilities and animosity abroad. “Faced with this shift in the balance of power between Fascism and anti-fascism, a rift emerged, slowly but steadily, within the ranks of Italian anti-fascism—namely, between those who refused to revise their outdated conception of an anti-fascist revolution, as in 1848, and those who still adhered to the idea—Marxist and realist—that the anti-fascist revolution would have no chance of success until the day the masses regained their capacity for action. And the socialists, growing in number and determination, declared themselves in favor of the second conception. The leaders of “Giustizia e Libertà” abroad remained increasingly faithful to the conception of the anti-fascist revolution, which we will call individualist in contrast to the socialist conception.

“Inevitably, this conflict could not help but soon go beyond the bounds of a purely doctrinal discussion and intensify when it came to concrete decisions regarding propaganda and action. The result was confusion in propaganda and paralysis in action. When the socialists proposed launching a campaign in Italy for a genuine and general amnesty, the others refused to hear of it, seeing in it a certain rejection of intransigence, and the proposal was sabotaged. The same outcome occurred regarding the effort to resume workers’ union action within the country. There was apparent support, but no real attempt at implementation. The Communists, who at first mocked the idea, have since seized upon it and are making use of it.

“When Hitler’s attack gave rise to the dangerous illusion that a good little preventive war should not be rejected—because it would ultimately free the world from Fascism—unfortunately, not only the Democrats but also the leaders of ‘Giustizia e Libertà’ made no secret of their sympathies for such

ideas, to which, with few exceptions, Italian socialists have always been unanimously opposed. And on this occasion—that is, at the end of last December—one might have wondered whether the alliance between 'GL' and the Socialists had not suffered an irreparable blow, all the more so because, precisely at that time, within the country and among the ranks of militant anti-fascism, a reevaluation of tactical guidelines was taking place, which was about to yield fairly precise suggestions from comrades in Italy.

"After the experiences gained while active in the GL groups"—created within the country mostly by socialists—some comrades in Italy had come to the conclusion that it was time to abandon the illusions of a rather primitive form of revolutionism, incapable of mobilizing the masses, and that it was necessary to resort to tactical methods, taking full account of the fact that, in the political struggle, workers and the popular classes in general cannot act in isolation as conspirators as easily as the more educated elements of the middle classes do. As a result, to bring the masses into the struggle, it is necessary to put forward overarching demands, without abandoning piecemeal demands (cultural, labor, administrative, and others) when these can attract a larger number of demonstrators—and especially when they can lead to public demonstrations that cannot be ignored—in order to strip them of the burst of energy that characterizes them. There is no doubt that it is worthwhile to be less revolutionary in theory and doctrine when one is able to achieve broader, more lasting, and more profound results.

"And so these suggestions, even though they came from within the country, had the effect of precipitating decisions by the leaders of GL abroad—decisions that were bound to provoke a unanimous revolt by the Italian Socialist Party. Most of the leaders of "Giustizia e Libertà" abroad did not join the ranks of socialism until they were in exile. And many of them did not take our side in Italy until after the great Benito came to power. This led them, recently, not to rebel against the idea of going to war—as they have done—against Italian socialism, reproaching it for not having been the strongest when it was fighting Fascism alone, a Fascism armed by capitalism and flanked, even before the March on Rome, by all the forces of the Italian state. Worse still. When, last February, a protest of indignation erupted within the ranks of the Italian Socialist Party against these attacks—which, unfortunately, came from our allies—the leaders of GL abroad, whom they had been nurturing for a long time and had kept secret until then,

"According to their proposals, all the traditional Italian left-wing parties, which had been reconstituted in exile, were to be dissolved; a single chaotic party was to be formed. Socialists who did not agree with GL's leaders abroad would have been denied access to this party; the chaotic and quasi-dictatorial structure of this new "chaos" party would have been designed to be dominated by those who no longer hid their desire for a socialism without socialists—that is, a classless and anti-Marxist socialist party. Furthermore, the new chaotic party was not to join the Second International unless certain conditions were first accepted. And this meant that Italian socialists had to leave the Socialist International.

"Perhaps the criticisms raised in Italy within the very ranks of GL members—regarding the tactical directives followed by the leaders of this organization—have served to push GL's leaders abroad to attempt an assault on the traditional socialist movement and the PSI. It is therefore true that this chaotic and contradictory plan for a socialist party without socialists is by no means improvised. For some time now, this plan had appeared to many intellectuals—devoid of any experience of working-class and class-based realities—as the very thing needed to alleviate the frustration of waiting. These are intellectuals who are all too easily revolutionary. GL had ceased to be the common organ of action in Italy for the coalition of parties that constituted the Concentration. Instead, it had transformed into a new political association that was not only autonomous but determined, at any cost, to do as it pleased.

“This would have caused fewer problems if GL had not been the focal point of anti-fascism within the country—a role recognized in the past by all members of the Concentration. Consequently, it was the common organ of action within the country, which was supposed to act in the name of and according to the directives of republican and socialist anti-fascism. Following the internal developments within the GL and the external demonstrations we have mentioned, the GL could have remained within the Concentrationist coalition as a new political formation, but it would have had to relinquish its role as the collective representative of the entire coalition within the country.

“A proposal to this effect was put forward by the Socialists at a heated meeting held at the anti-fascist rally in Paris on May 3. The Republicans declared their support for this proposal, which could have allowed the ‘CA’ to continue the joint struggle. But the GL leaders abroad would have none of it. They insisted on reserving for themselves some unspecified preeminence of action within the country and did not deviate from their plan to take control of the Italian socialist movement. And when every attempt at an agreement proved futile, there was no one left who could believe that the coalition could survive this fatal blow.”

3. Mussolini: “Aphorisms” (1931).

A monarchy justifies its existence when the King himself is the first to consider himself a monarchist; otherwise, one cannot expect the monarchists themselves to be any less republican than the king.

When a king abdicates, he resigns and must therefore be replaced: either by another king, if one exists, or by a president. In either case, a republic must necessarily be proclaimed. An empire is never born from the resignation of a sovereign.

Its emergence is more complex, more noble, and more grand: it arises from a tacit or explicit designation by the people or from a victory.

The Spanish Republic has not—in general—received favorable press: no one in Europe felt an urgent need for it. From a European perspective, the naval agreement or the Austro-German move is an infinitely more important event.

In Paris, the former king received a tremendous welcome. Explanation: in Madrid they are fed up with the monarchy; in Paris, with the republic.

The Spanish Republic is not a revolution: it is a plagiarism. A plagiarism that is a full 150 years behind the times. Establishing a parliamentary republic today is like using kerosene in the age of electric light.

Revolution? But a revolution is first and foremost a movement of ideas that develops and becomes universal. Where is any of that in Spain? The Republic heralds a series of retrospective trials: its leaders are—in fact—prominent lawyers.

A regime does not defend itself at the last minute: it is defended from the very beginning and thereafter at every hour and every minute, and even at the very last hour—but in this case with the most unyielding resolve: what are a thousand deaths (though a volley of blanks might suffice) if one is convinced that the triumph of a certain principle means the ruin of a people and the likelihood of an infinitely greater number of victims tomorrow?

Kerensky does not recall Nicholas. He paves the way for Lenin.

Today it is no longer a question of republic or monarchy, but of communism or fascism.

Even in Italy, some are surprised that the Spanish clergy and the Catholics of Spain have abandoned the monarchy. This happened exactly one week after the Easter ceremonies during which the King had washed the feet of beggars and taken part in a procession. His Catholic Majesty of Spain had no defenders among the Catholics. That is the fact. But what were the reasons? Reasons of a historical nature: the Church does not make political institutions a matter of real concern—except in an extremely theoretical sense—but judges institutions by the attitude they adopt toward the Church. There is no doubt that the Spanish monarchy favored the Church. Nevertheless, that support was lacking. We must realize that bishops are not political leaders or army generals, but shepherds: the people they lead form the flock, a flock of sheep. Now, a single wolf can scatter a million sheep.

The stupidity of democracy—which thrives on an enormous lie combined with a massive smoke-and-mirrors act for the so-called sovereign people—is revealed once again in the comparisons that some draw between Italy and Spain. To do so, one must be stupid to the point of absurdity.

The paradox in all this is that the democrats have not respected the will of the majority: Zamora has thus trampled on one of the dogmas of democracy—the verdict of the ballot box has been nullified, and the cities have overwhelmed the countryside. To establish the regime of immortal principles, one had to begin by denying them.

One would have to be utterly unintelligent to take any of this seriously!

4. Statute of the PNF

(Text from 1938 with subsequent amendments through 1943).

Art. 1. The National Fascist Party is a voluntary civilian militia under the command of the Duce, in the service of the Fascist State.

Art. 2. The Duce is the Head of the PNF. He issues orders for the actions to be carried out and, when he deems it necessary, convenes the leadership for a Grand Report. Art. 3. The duties of the PNF are: the defense and strengthening of the Fascist Revolution; the political education of Italians.

Art. 4. The Fascist views life as duty, self-improvement, and conquest, and must always keep in mind the Duce's commandment: "Believe, Obey, Fight."

Art. 5. The emblem of the PNF is the Fascio Littorio.

Art. 6. The insignia of the PNF consist of the Labarum of the National Directorate and the pennants of the A.O. Rapid Response Column. The organizations of the PNF have their own insignia. Military honors are due to the insignia of the PNF, the insignia of the Federations of Combat Fasci (Labari), and the insignia of the Combat Fasci (Gagliardetti), and they are entitled to an honor guard.

Art. 7. Every Fascist must wear the PNF badge.

Art. 8. Italian citizenship is a necessary condition for membership in the PNF. Italian citizens who, under the provisions of the law, are considered to be of the Jewish race may not be enrolled in the PNF.

Art. 9. Fascist Conscription takes place annually. Fascist Conscription consists of the transfer of the "Figli della Lupa" into the ranks of the "Balilla" and the "Piccole Italiane"; from the Balilla into the ranks of the Avanguardisti; from the Avanguardisti into the University Fascist Groups or the ranks of the Young Fascists; from the University Fascists and the Young Fascists into the PNF and the M.V.S.N.; from the Piccole Italiane into the ranks of the Young Italian Women; from the Young Italian Women into the ranks of the Young Fascist Women; and from the Young Fascist Women into the Women's Fasci. The Fascist takes an oath before the Political Secretary of the Combat Fascio, using the following formula: "In the name of God and Italy, I swear to carry out the orders of the Duce and to serve the cause of the Fascist Revolution with all my strength and, if necessary, with my blood."

Art. 10. The PNF is composed of the Fasci di combattimento. The Fasci di combattimento are organized within the Provinces of the Kingdom, the Governments of the Empire, the Provinces of Libya, and the Italian Possession of the Aegean Islands into Federations of the Fasci di combattimento. Within the Fasci di combattimento, local Fascist groups, sectors, and cells may be established. The Fasci di combattimento of each Federation of Fasci di combattimento are grouped, in each province, into zones. The following are organizations of the National Fascist Party: the Groups of University Fascists, the Italian Youth of the Littorio, the Women's Fasci with their Sections: rural housewives and home workers; the Fascist School Association, the Fascist Association of Public Employees; the Fascist Association of State Railroad Workers; the Fascist Association of Postal and Telegraph Workers, and the Fascist Association of Employees of State-Owned Industrial Enterprises. The following organizations report directly to the National Fascist Party: the Fascist Association of Families of the Fallen, the Maimed, and the Wounded for the Revolution; the National After-Work Association; the National Union of Retired Officers of Italy; the Italian National Olympic Committee; the Italian Naval League; the National Fascist Senate Union; the National Institute of Fascist Culture; the National Association of War-Maimed and Disabled; the National Combatants' Association; the National Association of Families of the Fallen in War; the Group of Gold Medals for Military Valor of Italy; the Institute of the Blue Ribbon among Combatants Decorated for Military Valor; the Legion of Volunteers of Italy; the Garibaldi Legion; the Arditi Units of Italy; the Armed Forces Units; the Muslim Association of the Littorio; the National Forestry Committee. Within each Federation of the Fasci di Combattimento, the following are established: a Federal Command of the Italian Youth of the Littorio; a Group of University Fascists; a Federation of Women's Fasci with the following sections: rural housewives and home workers; sections of the Fascist Association of Families of the Fallen, Maimed, and Wounded for the Revolution; sections of the Fascist Associations of School Employees, Public Servants, Railroad Workers, Postal and Telegraph Workers, and Employees of State-Owned Industrial Enterprises; a provincial after-work club; a group of the National Union of Retired Officers of Italy; a section of the Italian Naval League; a provincial committee of the Italian National Olympic Committee; a section of the National Institute of Fascist Culture; a provincial federation of the National Association of War-Mutilated and Disabled; a provincial federation of the National Association of Combatants; a provincial committee of the National Association of Families of the War Dead; a provincial section of the Institute of the Blue Ribbon among combatants decorated for military valor; a Battalion of Italian Volunteers; a Garibaldi Cohort; a Provincial Unit of the Arditi d'Italia; the following military units: a Group of Italian Sailors; a Cohort of Italian Carabinieri; a Battalion of Sardinian Grenadiers; a Battalion of Italian Bersaglieri; an Alpine Unit; a Cavalry Squadron Group of Italy; an Artillery Group of Italy; an Engineer Battalion; a Finance Corps Cohort of Italy; an Infantry Battalion of Italy; a Section of the National Forestry Committee Art. II. The PNF is the sole party of the Regime and has legal personality. The Federations of the Fasci di Combattimento and the Fasci di Combattimento themselves also have legal personality.

Art. 12. The leaders of the PNF are:

1) the Secretary of the National Fascist Party;

2) the members of the National Directorate of the PNF;

3) the Inspectors of the PNF;

4) the federal secretaries in charge of the Federations of Combat Groups and the "assigned" federal secretaries with special duties;

5) the members of the Federal Directorates;

6) the federal inspectors in charge of the Zones and the federal inspectors “assigned” to specific tasks;

7) the political secretaries in charge of the Fasci di combattimento and the political secretaries “assigned” to specific tasks;

8) Members of the Fasci di Combattimento leadership; g) Trustees of the local Fascist groups;

10) Members of the Councils of the local Fascist groups;

11) Sector leaders;

12) Unit leaders.

Art. 13. The Grand Council of Fascism, the supreme collegial body, deliberates on the Statute and the directives of the PNF. The following are advisory and executive bodies:

1) the National Directorate of the PNF;

2) the National Council of the PNF;

3) the Directorate of the Federation of Combat Fasci (Federal Directorate);

4) the Directorate of the Combat Fasci;

5) the Council of the Fascist District Group.

Art. 14. The Secretary of the PNF is appointed and removed by Royal Decree upon the proposal of the DUCE and is accountable to the DUCE for the acts and measures of the PNF. The Secretary of the PNF holds the title and functions of Minister-Secretary of State. The Secretary of the PNF is Secretary of the Grand Council of Fascism pursuant to Law No. 2693 of December 1928—VII, and is a member of the Supreme Defense Commission, the National Council of Corporations, the Central Corporate Committee, and the National Council of Education, Sciences, and Arts; he is Secretary of the University Fascist Groups; he is Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Youth of the Littorio; reporting directly to him are: the Fascist Association of Families of the Fallen, the Maimed, and the Wounded for the Revolution; the University Fascist Groups; the Italian Youth of the Littorio; the Women’s Fasci, with their sections: rural housewives and home workers; the PNF Associations (Fascist Associations of School Employees, Public Servants, Railroad Workers, Postal and Telegraph Workers, and Employees of State-Owned Industrial Enterprises); the National After-Work Association; the National Union of Retired Officers of Italy; the Italian National Olympic Committee; the Italian Naval League; the National Fascist Union of the Senate; the National Institute of Fascist Culture; the National Association of War-Maimed and Disabled Persons; the National Association of Combatants; the National Association of Families of the Fallen in War; the Group of Gold Medals for Military Valor of Italy; the Institute of the Blue Ribbon for Combatants Decorated for Military Valor; the Italian Volunteer Legion; the Garibaldi Legion; the Arditi Units of Italy; the Armed Forces Units; the Muslim Association of the Littorio; the National Forestry Committee. The Secretary of the National Fascist Party represents the PNF in all respects.

Art. I 5. The Secretary of the PNF proposes to the DUCE the appointment and removal of members—other than those by right— the National Directorate of the PNF, the PNF Inspectors, the Federal Secretaries who are in charge of the Federations of the Fasci di Combattimento or "commanded" with special assignments, the National Leaders of the Organizations subordinate to the PNF, and the Extraordinary Commissioners attached to the Federations of the Fasci di Combattimento; appointment and removal:

a) the members, federal directors, and central and provincial leaders of the PNF organizations;

b) the leaders of the National Fascist Union of the Senate;

c) the auditors of the PNF's accounts;

- designates to the DUCE the president and vice presidents of the National Institute of Fascist Culture; to the Minister for Corporations, the PNF representatives in the Corporations and the section presidents of the Provincial Councils of the Corporations; to the Minister for Italian Africa, the vice presidents of the Corporate Councils; and to the Minister of the Interior, the PNF representatives in the Provincial Administrative Councils; to the Minister of Justice the representatives on the Central Commission and the District Commissions referred to in Articles 12 and 16 of Law No. 1054 of June 29, 1939—XVII, governing the practice of professions by citizens of the Jewish race; has the authority to establish and dissolve the Fasci di Combattimento; directs the activities of the National Directorate, convenes it, and presides over it; convenes and presides over the National Council of the PNF;

- issues regulations and rules governing the operation of the PNF's bodies, organizations, and entities subordinate to the PNF; maintains liaison between the PNF and State bodies; exercises political control over the Regime's organizations and over the appointment of Fascists to political offices and positions;

- has the authority to summon PNF hierarchs, Black Shirts, and members of organizations subordinate to the PNF to report to him;

- has the authority to annul or amend the decisions of subordinate hierarchies, over which it has the power of substitution;

- has the authority to remove subordinate Party leaders from their Party offices and assignments.

Art. 16. The National Directorate of the PNF, chaired by the Secretary of the PNF, consists of three Deputy Secretaries, four ex officio members—namely, the Ministers for Corporations and for Popular Culture, the Undersecretary of State for the Interior, and the Chief of Staff of the M. V. S. N.—and seven other members. By decree of the DUCE, at the request of the Secretary of the PNF, the number of Deputy Secretaries may be increased to four. The National Directorate of the PNF exercises advisory and executive functions in accordance with the directives of the Secretary of the PNF.

Art. 17 1. The National Council of the National Fascist Party consists of the Secretary of the National Fascist Party and the National Directorate.

Art. 18. The members of the National Council of the PNF are part of the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations.

Art. 19. The Deputy Secretaries of the PNF assist the Secretary of the PNF, replace him in the event of

absence or incapacity, hold the rank of Deputy Commanders-General of the Italian Youth of the Littorio, and are members of the National Council of Corporations and the Central Corporate Committee.

Art. 20. The Secretary of the PNF sets the administrative policy and exercises control over the financial and asset management of the National Fascist Party, including the federal secretaries; the Secretary and Inspectors of the Italian Fasci abroad; the President of the Fascist Association of the Maimed and Wounded for the Revolution; the President of the National Work Organization; the National Trustees of the Fascist Associations of Public School Employees, Postal and Telegraph Workers, and Employees of State-Owned Industrial Enterprises; the National Fascist Social Security and Welfare Agency for State Employees; the National Institute of Fascist Culture; the President of the National After-Work Organization; and the Italian National Olympic Committee; by the President of the National Association of War Veterans, by the President of the National Association of Combatants; by the Presidents of the Fascist Employers' and Workers' Associations, and by the President of the National Council of Professionals and Artists. The Delegate of the National Party to the Governorate of Montenegro is also a member.

"Art. 2. This law takes effect on December 19, 1942—XXI."

The Royal Decree-Law was not submitted to the Senate in time for conversion by July 25.

The Secretary of the PNF appoints a Head of Administrative Services, chosen from among the officials of the Ministry of Finance, who implements his directives, monitors the administrative operations of the Fascist Federations and the Fasci di Combattimento, and is responsible for the administration of the PNF;

The Head of Administrative Services is a member of the Central Committee for University Affairs.

Art. 21. Oversight of the PNF's accounts is entrusted to a Board of Auditors, consisting of three regular members and two alternates appointed by the Secretary of the PNF from among those who are not members of the National Directorate.

The auditors must submit their joint report to the Secretary of the PNF each year.

Art. 22. The PNF Inspectors and the "appointed" Federal Secretaries carry out the duties entrusted to them by the Secretary of the PNF.

Art. 23. The Federation of Combat Groups is governed by the Federal Secretary.

The Federal Secretary implements the directives and carries out the orders of the Secretary of the PNF. Within the province, he promotes and supervises the activities of the Combat Fasci and the organizations subordinate to the PNF; he also supervises the organizations of the Regime and the assignment of offices and duties to Fascists. He maintains contact with the peripheral offices of the State and with the representatives of local public bodies;

- serves as the federal commander of the Italian Youth of the Littorio;

- serves as the political secretary of the Combat Fascio of the provincial capital;

- serves on the Executive Committee of the Provincial Council of Corporations and on the University Works Committee in cities with universities;

- convenes and presides over the Federal Directorate, which includes reports from the provincial leaders, Fascists, and members of organizations affiliated with the National Fascist Party (PNF);

- in the province;

- directs political training courses for young people;

- proposes to the Secretary of the PNF the appointment and removal of members of the Federal Directorate, from among whom he designates the federal deputy secretaries; of the provincial leaders of the PNF organizations and affiliated associations; appoints and removes federal inspectors who are assigned to specific zones or “commanded” for special tasks, political secretaries who are assigned to the province’s Fasci di combattimento or “commanded” for special tasks, members of the Fasci di combattimento leadership, and trustees of the local Fascist groups, the members of the Councils of the local Fascist Groups, the sector leaders, and the unit leaders;

- exercises control over the Federation’s financial and asset management and has a head of federal administrative services reporting to him;

- has the authority to dissolve the Executive Boards of the Fasci di combattimento and the Councils of the local Fascist groups and to appoint commissioners to temporarily oversee them;

- promotes and regulates the sports activities of the relevant organizations in accordance with the guidelines set by the Italian National Olympic Committee.

The provincial leaders of the PNF organizations and of the bodies subordinate to the PNF are subordinate to the Federal Secretary, who represents the PNF in the province in all respects.

The Deputy Federal Secretaries assist the Federal Secretary and replace him in the event of absence or incapacity.

Audit authority over the accounts of the Federation of Combat Fasci, the Group of University Fascists, and the Federation of Women’s Fasci is vested in a Board of three auditors appointed by the Federal Secretary from among individuals who are not members of the Federal Directorate.

Federal inspectors carry out inspection duties in the areas under their jurisdiction or perform the tasks entrusted to them by the Federal Secretary. Art. 24. The Combat Fascio is governed by the political secretary.

The political secretary of the Combat Fascio implements the directives and carries out the orders of the Federal Secretary;

- promotes and oversees the activities of the Party and Regime organizations and the appointment of Fascists to offices and positions within the territory where the Combat Group operates;

- maintains liaison with state bodies and local public entities; proposes to the Federal Secretary the appointment and removal of members of the Combat Group’s Executive Committee, from among

whom he designates the Deputy Political Secretary, the trustees of the Fascist District Groups, the members of the Fascist District Group Council, the sector leaders, and the cell leaders. If the sectors and nuclei are organized within Fascist District Groups, proposals for the appointment of sector leaders and nucleus leaders must be made after consulting with the trustee of the Fascist District Group;

- convenes and presides over the Executive Committee of the Combat Faction and oversees relations among Fascists;

- proposes to the federal secretary the establishment of Fascist District Groups and has the authority to form and dissolve sectors and units;

- designates its representatives to the Committee of the Municipal Welfare Agency;

- manages the assets and finances of the Combat Fascio.

The deputy secretary of the Fascio di combattimento assists the political secretary and replaces him in the event of absence or incapacity.

Art. 25. The Fascist Neighborhood Group is led by the trustee.

The trustee of the Fascist Neighborhood Group implements the directives and carries out the orders of the political secretary of the Combat Group; he appoints a deputy trustee to the political secretary of the Combat Group, chosen from among the members of the Group's Council.

Art. 26. The Executive Committee of the Federation of Combat Groups consists of two federal deputy secretaries and nine other members, who are: the federal deputy commander of the Italian Youth of the Lictor; the secretary of the University Fascists Group; the highest-ranking officer on active duty in the province of the Volunteer Militia for National Security; the president of the Provincial Dopolavoro; the president of the section of the National Institute of Fascist Culture; the president of the Provincial Committee of the Italian National Olympic Committee; one member responsible for overseeing the Federation's administrative and financial activities; and two members who shall be selected—as a rule—from among the federal inspectors and political secretaries who have demonstrated outstanding organizational skills.

To oversee the Federation's administrative and financial activities, the member assigned to this task will receive specific assignments and delegated authority from the Federal Secretary.

The Federal Directorate exercises advisory and executive functions in accordance with the directives of the Federal Secretary.

The Secretary of the PNF has the authority to increase the number of Federal Deputy Secretaries to up to four.

When deemed appropriate, the Federal Secretaries shall, on a case-by-case basis, invite the leaders of the province's trade unions, professional associations, economic organizations, and welfare agencies to participate in meetings of the Federal Directorate and to report on matters within their purview.

The Executive Committee of the Combat Faction consists of a political deputy secretary and six other members.

The Executive Committee of the Fascio di combattimento in provincial capitals consists of a deputy political secretary and seven other members.

The Secretary of the PNF has the authority to increase the number of other members to nine.

The Executive Committee of the Combat Group exercises advisory and executive functions in accordance with the directives of the political secretary of the Combat Group. The Council of the Fascist Neighborhood Group consists of a deputy trustee and four other members.

It exercises advisory and executive functions in accordance with the directives of the Group's trustee.

Art. 27. Any Fascist who violates the political and moral discipline of the Party or is indicted in a criminal trial shall be referred to the competent disciplinary bodies.

Art. 28. Disciplinary penalties are:

1) censure;

2) suspension for a fixed term (from one month to one year);

3) indefinite suspension;

4) revocation of Party membership;

5) expulsion;

6) expulsion.

Art. 29. The punishments referred to in paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 of Art. 28 are imposed for minor offenses that do not damage the moral character of the Fascist.

Withdrawal of membership is imposed on a Fascist who commits serious disciplinary offenses and who proves unworthy of serving in the ranks of the PNF.

The penalty referred to in paragraph 5 of Article 28 is imposed on a Fascist who has committed acts or received convictions that damage his moral character.

The punishment referred to in paragraph 6 of Article 28 is imposed on those who betray the Cause of the Fascist Revolution.

No punishment may be proposed or imposed until the charges have been presented and the defense heard, except in cases of flagrante delicto.

Art. 30. A Federal Disciplinary Commission shall be established within each Federation of the Fasci di Combattimento; it shall be chaired by a federal deputy secretary and shall consist of six regular members, four alternate members, and a secretary, all of whom shall not be members of the Federal Directorate.

Appointments are made by the Federal Secretary.

A Disciplinary Commission shall be established within each Fascio di combattimento and each Fascist neighborhood group, consisting of a chairperson and two members who are not part of the Fascio di combattimento's Executive Committee or the group's Council, appointed by the Federal Secretary upon the recommendation of the Fascio di combattimento's political secretary.

Art. 31. The Secretary of the PNF has the authority to impose all disciplinary measures referred to in Art. 28.

The Secretary of the PNF has the authority to refer cases warranting special consideration to the Federal Disciplinary Commission of the Federation of Combat Groups to which the Fascist to be judged belongs, or to the Central Disciplinary Court presided over by a deputy secretary of the PNF and composed of five members and a secretary appointed by him.

In such cases, the findings of the Federal Disciplinary Commission or the Central Disciplinary Court must be submitted to the Secretary of the PNF for a decision.

The Federal Secretary has the authority to impose, upon the recommendation of the Federal Disciplinary Commission, the disciplinary measures referred to in paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 of Article 28, and—in urgent cases—to directly impose the disciplinary measures referred to in paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 4 of that article.

The Federal Disciplinary Commission is authorized to examine cases referred to it by the Federal Secretary and to propose disciplinary measures of reprimand, suspension for a fixed term, and suspension for an indefinite term. However, when the findings of the investigation warrant the sanction of withdrawal of membership, expulsion, or expulsion from the Party, it forwards the case files to the Federal Secretary, who submits them to the Secretary of the PNF for a decision.

When the Federal Secretary, in urgent cases, adopts the measure of revoking membership, he reports this in detail and without delay to the Party Secretary, who is ultimately responsible for confirming the measure.

The disciplinary committees established within the Fasci di combattimento and the neighborhood groups are authorized to examine cases referred to them by the political secretary or the trustee of the neighborhood group, or by the federal secretary; the results of the investigations must be forwarded to the latter for a decision.

Art. 32. Appeals against disciplinary measures imposed by the federal secretary may be filed with the Secretary of the PNF.

The measures are immediately enforceable, notwithstanding any appeal.

Art. 33. Any Fascist who is subject to one of the measures referred to in paragraphs 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Art. 28 must cease all political activity.

A Fascist upon whom the measure referred to in paragraph 6 of Article 28 is imposed must be banned from public life.

Art. 34. Disciplinary measures may be imposed on Senators and National Councilors only by the Secretary of the PNF.

National Councilors or members of the Corporations who are subject to the disciplinary measures referred to in paragraphs 2 and 3 of Article 28 shall be suspended from the exercise of their functions.

From the date of the disciplinary measure, the enjoyment of all privileges of any kind pertaining to the status of National Councilor or member of the Corporations shall be suspended.

Art. 35. The Secretary of the PNF has the authority to review the status of punished Fascists and may revoke or modify the disciplinary measures adopted.

The Federal Secretary may review the status of punished Fascists and determine the termination, modification, or revocation of the measures adopted pursuant to paragraph 4 of Article 31. In cases involving the withdrawal of membership cards, expulsion, or dismissal, the Federal Secretary may submit reasoned proposals to the Secretary of the PNF, who shall decide on readmission.

Art. 36. Those who cease to be members of the PNF shall be removed from the offices and positions they hold.

Art. 37. The Fascist year begins on October 29.

5. Report on Italian foreign policy sent to Rome by L. Vitetti (July 1932).

Your Excellency,

The Lausanne Conference ended on a negative note for Italian policy.

No matter how one views its results, they are detrimental to us. The Lausanne Conference marked:

1) Germany’s release from its financial obligations to the Allies, without the Allies being released from their obligations to the United States, nor Italy and France from their obligations to England;

2) An Anglo-French rapprochement, in the form of a Pact of Trust, which, while not having the character attributed to it by Herriot, nevertheless represents, on the part of Great Britain, the acknowledgment that the most appropriate procedure for resolving European political problems must be based on a preliminary agreement between England and France;

3) A strengthening of Germany’s position, which, having freed itself from the burden of reparations, will henceforth be able to devote itself more freely to achieving the objectives of its foreign policy, at least two of which—its armaments and the annexation of Austria—are in direct conflict with our interests.

As a result of these developments, our relations with the great powers of Europe are all being altered to a greater or lesser extent, and our freedom of action with respect to all the great powers is significantly reduced. All of these powers will have less need of us in the near future: Germany, which has now achieved, with our help, the first and most essential of its objectives, and will find in its increased freedom and strength the opportunity to pursue a more independent policy; France, which, with the end of reparations, sees the greatest obstacle to a revival of the Franco-British Entente removed; England itself, having settled the reparations, is no longer obliged to turn to us to secure our cooperation in resolving the problem of Germany's economic reconstruction and Germany's return to a policy of cooperation within the European community—a policy that has constituted one of the strongest links between British and Italian politics in recent years.

II) The British British and the Italian Italian did not have a permanent permanent , England having absolute need for world world for stability and conservation preservation, whereas Italy is required by its necessities to 5. Report on foreign foreign sent submitted to Rome by L. Vitetti 839 Life − and above of all now in the wake of following of European in and the American American − to expand gain among the great empires that have have arose in form in the nineteenth century. What has united us with England in recent years has been solely a certain affinity of interests regarding the issue of the European balance of power, since we are separated from continental Europe by the Alps just as they are by the English Channel, and we have no ambition to extend our dominion over any continental territory. In the years following the war, this convergence of interests has consistently drawn us close to British policy, in which we have also found the only possible support to resist France's overwhelming power and the attempts at political, financial, and military dictatorship that France has made in Europe in recent years. We, still bearing in our hearts the bitterness of the Paris Peace Conference and the political disloyalty of Clemenceau and Poincaré, and the British, concerned with rebuilding the European economy on the basis of Franco-German reconciliation, have been united from 1920 to the present in a policy of treaty revision; however, for the British, this has never gone beyond the issue of reparations and a fair recognition of Germany's rights within the European community, whereas for us it has always meant a revision in Italy's favor of the distribution of non-European colonial territories. These are the ties—neither very solid nor very enduring—that have linked British policy to Italian policy, and which the Lausanne Conference has partly dissolved and the Disarmament Conference is partly dissolving, while England must inevitably adjust its position toward France. Once, in fact, the restrictions have been lifted, and once equality of rights in the field of armaments has been admitted, recognized, and implemented—a first step toward parity between German and French forces—what interests will there be left that could induce England to pursue a policy of limiting French military strength? And what need will England still have for Italian cooperation in the face of France? In the coming years, England will have no choice but to shift the focus of its actions—as indicated by the Pact of Trust—toward closer cooperation with France, to which, after all, it is bound by the fundamental interest of preserving stability in the world order. The Pact of Trust is certainly neither a Franco-British alliance, nor an abandonment of the system of equidistance enshrined in the Locarno Agreements, nor a renunciation of the policy of European balance, but it is undoubtedly a symptom, an indicator, a trend, the beginning of a course—perhaps a goal—toward which England is slowly but logically moving. This course is facilitated by the decline of French financial power, which in the last two years had threatened British supremacy and humiliated the City; by the first signs of a German political revival that already appears to be more rapid and more violent than England had anticipated; and finally by the extreme weakness into which the Labour Party has been reduced—a party that in recent years has been the most resolute supporter of revisionism, and which for a long time will be unable to recover from the blow it suffered in last fall's elections and exert its influence on the direction of British foreign policy. The British Conservatives have always been inclined toward a policy of Anglo-French solidarity, tempered only by the British aversion to any form of French dominance over Germany. With the

possibility of such dominance having vanished or diminished, the rationale for Labour's opposition to French policy also vanishes or diminishes. Greater closeness between France and England is in the nature of things—that is to say, in the fundamental identity of the two countries' interests—and in the logic of events. And have we not ourselves observed, during the final phase of the Disarmament Conference—I am referring in particular to the period immediately preceding and following the presentation of the Hoover Plan—and then during the Lausanne Conference, a growing closeness in relations between the British and French governments? This may well have been due to the personal rapport that has always bound MacDonald and Herriot and to their theory of the two Western democracies that must stand united, but was there not also—in excluding us from the confidential Franco-Anglo-American meetings—a British desire to resolve the arms issue through a direct agreement with France, based on the old principle of parallel concessions by England to France in the field of security in exchange for French concessions to Germany in the field of disarmament? And what is fundamentally different about the Pact of Trust? And does French security not naturally fall within the general framework of preservation and stability that is the framework of British policy?

III) The consequences of the Treaty of Lausanne are even more serious in our relations with Germany. Our policy toward Germany—which certainly could not have been more liberal in recent years—was based on the notion that it was not in Italy's interest to allow France to gain overwhelming supremacy in Europe, nor was it in Europe's interest to impoverish, humiliate, and isolate Germany. This notion also constituted, as I was saying, one of the strongest bonds between England and us. We were rightly afraid that an impoverished, humiliated, and isolated Germany would turn for help either to Russia or to France, and that this would lead either to the consolidation of the German-Bolshevik alliance of Rapallo or to the formation, under conditions of inequality, of a Franco-German agreement far more dangerous to us than the one to which they had aimed with their conciliatory policy, and on terms of relative equality, as Herriot and Briand had done. By supporting and encouraging Germany, we have essentially pursued two goals in recent years: to put Germany in a position to resist Russia and France, and to highlight Italy's position vis-à-vis the French. It seemed to us that strengthening Germany was necessary not only to prevent it from either falling prey to Russian Bolshevism or coming under French domination, but also so that, on the one hand, it could curb Bolshevik pressure on Europe, and on the other, it would pose such a threat to France as to compel France to revise its policy toward us, and eventually, through a revision of the mandates, open the doors of its colonial empire.

The Germans have always fully understood that these were the true aims of our policy. But since they needed our help—and within the limits of that need—they had to serve us. I say "within the limits of this necessity" because—as happened immediately after the conclusion of the Treaty of Locarno—whenever they believed they could do without Italy, they turned against us with the age-old hatred they harbor for the Italian name and with their sights set on Austria and South Tyrol. Indeed, there has always been in recent years a latent hostility between the Germans and us, which has simmered beneath the thin veneer of our good relations, we, in reality, hoping that the Germans would rise from their prostration and become strong enough to threaten France, but not to threaten us; they, on the other hand, hoping to be so strong and so free as to no longer need Italian aid, which they have always accepted with more resentment than gratitude.

To resolve the issue of reparations and that of its rearmament—that is, to regain its economic and political independence—Italy's aid has been and remains indispensable to Germany. In recent years, it has been the combined action of the British and Italian governments that has allowed Germany to breathe, and the very policy of reconciliation pursued by Briand was dictated to France more by the fear of being isolated in its attempts to isolate Germany than by a change in the French attitude. Germany has needed, needs, and will continue to need us. What is certain, however, is that when this

need ceases—that is, when Germany has achieved its economic and political independence—there will be a decisive shift in German policy toward Italy. The Lausanne Conference—with the cancellation of reparations—has accelerated this trend, just as the conclusion of the Pact of Trust, by increasing the risks of Germany's political isolation in Europe, has delayed it. It remains to be seen to what extent these two opposing forces will be able to balance each other out.

In the meantime, it is obvious that Germany's position vis-à-vis us has strengthened. The cancellation of reparations is a clear and permanent advantage for Germany—both economically and politically. The conclusion of the Pact of Trust is a disadvantage for both of us. And in a certain sense, it is actually a greater disadvantage for us—who have been abandoned by England—than it is for Germany, whose policy was not based, like ours, on close cooperation with England. If the Trust Pact was, in fact, the price MacDonald paid to Herriot for abandoning reparations, Germany subsequently derived some benefit from it, while we derived none. Indeed, in light of the Trust Pact—if it signifies a renewal of the Entente Cordiale—we need Germany just as much as Germany needs us. Having taken stock of the final balance of benefits and losses, the only thing that can be said is that Germany is now in a less desperate position vis-à-vis us, while we are in a more desperate position vis-à-vis Germany.

It is easy to see that this situation can logically only develop to our detriment. Freed from the burden of reparations—and from the severe limitations that reparations have imposed on its political independence—Germany will inevitably pursue its immediate objectives with greater speed and determination. As I mentioned at the beginning of this memorandum, these objectives are essentially two: the revision of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles relating to its armaments, and the annexation of Austria. The Lausanne Conference has brought Germany closer to both of these objectives.

I will not dwell on the question of armaments, since it is now clear that the principle of "equality of rights"—articulated with supreme statesmanlike skill by Dr. Bruning in his speech on February 1—has, so to speak, entered the popular consciousness of Europe and is inevitably gaining ground in Geneva. Before the Lausanne Conference, it might have been possible for France to reach an agreement with Germany by offering, on its own behalf, the cancellation of German reparations in exchange for maintaining the regime established in the Treaty of Versailles for a few years, or for a stabilization of German armaments. Today, France no longer has any bargaining chips, and time is inexorably working in Germany's favor; in February, Germany had only justice and common sense on its side, but now it also possesses greater independence and the courage that comes from having definitively dismantled the reparations mechanism. Part V of the Treaty of Versailles is now nothing more than an old, corroded door, and von Papen can knock it down with a single shoulder thrust, while it is clear that the release from its financial obligations to the Allies will give Germany the opportunity for an active economic recovery—and thus for a massive rearmament program. The reality is, therefore, that at Lausanne Germany not only secured the cancellation of reparations but also the practical ability to improve—and, in due course, expand—its army and navy, thereby asserting the independence of its policy in the face of both us and France.

This fact alone would bring Germany closer to what has clearly been revealed since July of last year to be its essential objective—namely, the economic and political absorption of Austria—even if British policy had not, in the meantime, been bringing it closer to that objective for the past year. England no longer wants anything to do with Austrian independence. The 1922 Protocol is a dead letter in English politics. At The Hague last year, it was saved with great effort by France and by us, against England's will, which not only distanced itself from our action before the Permanent Court of International Justice but also left it to Sir Cecil Hirst to argue Germany's case within the Court. From Lausanne, when it

came time to renew the Protocol's commitments, we once again faced British opposition, which went so far as to alarm Herriot; had it not been for Italy's resolute stance, he would have yielded to England and renounced that political clause, which the previous year had allowed us to thwart the plan for an economic union between Austria and Germany. And yet Germany felt so confident in Lausanne that it could refuse to accede to the Protocol and make a separate offer of financial assistance to Austria, laying bare before our very eyes the initial effects of the cancellation of reparations.

Just as it is inevitable that German policy will move toward independence in armaments and the absorption of Austria, so too is it inevitable that our freedom of action toward Germany will be limited and curtailed. I mean that we will no longer have the freedom to be friends or enemies of Germany, but will be forced either to accept, to our detriment, the results of its policy, or to ally ourselves with France against it.

IV) Placed as we are between the Pact of Trust—which, in its logical progression, should lead to some form of renewal of the Franco-British Entente—and the threat of a resurgence of German power, we cannot help but view the future state of our relations with France with apprehension. In past years, our reasoning was based on the hypothesis of a Germany that, by gradually growing stronger, would slowly make France feel the need for Italian friendship. We disapproved of a poor, humiliated, and isolated Germany—as I mentioned above—partly because France, not feeling threatened, could not turn to Italy but instead counted on its eastern alliances to potentially counter an Italian-German coalition, should Italy ever strengthen its ties with Germany to the point of joining the Triple Alliance. We were not wrong to reason this way, for it is in the miserly nature of the French—"more miserly," as Machiavelli said, "than prudent"—to yield only to necessity, and we had to bring home to them the danger of a resurgent Germany in order to induce them to consider, on a basis of equality and with adequate compensation, an alliance with Italy. But with regard to these objectives, our policy has always had—and must necessarily have—a limit. We could never extend our support and favor to Germany to the point of allowing the balance of power to shift, and German power to become so threatening as to force us into a compulsory alliance with France. This would be to risk our international freedom, and—in order to avoid the danger of French dominance—to foster with our own hands the establishment of a state of affairs in Europe that would make our policy a prisoner of forces stronger than ourselves. What, in fact, would Italy's position be on the day that an armed and powerful Germany appeared at the foot of our Alps and suddenly turned its gaze toward our sea? What could we do then? Or rather, what else could we do but accept from France the guarantee that Briand offered us in 1925—which we had the strength and wisdom to refuse at the time?

But the issue of our rapprochement with France cannot be considered solely in relation to the intensity of the pressure that Germany may exert on Central Europe. It is also closely linked to developments in Franco-British policy, which took shape in Lausanne in the Pact of Trust. For if France does not, as we believe, reach an advantageous agreement with Italy—unless compelled by the need to secure an Italian alliance against Germany's growing power—it is clear that, in assessing this need, it will initially have to begin with an evaluation of the strength and stability of the security guarantees offered to it by British policy. Today, these guarantees are precise but uncertain. The Treaty of Locarno establishes them with legal precision, yet this is not matched by a firmness of political direction capable of giving France that sense of security it anxiously seeks from England, from one treaty to the next and from one alliance to the next. There is something provisional and elusive about British policy that fails to satisfy the French imagination, which—dominated by the nightmare of a new German aggression—wants to see armies ready to march before it, not the five parliaments of the Empire arguing over the interpretation of the military assistance obligations provided for in the Treaties. What France has consistently sought in recent years—and continues to seek now—is a more general and

unconditional commitment on the part of England to intervene in a new European conflict should Germany attempt to use force to bring about the revision of the Treaties on which it has, for the time being, focused its diplomatic efforts. Does the Pact of Trust mark the beginning of closer Franco-British cooperation? Or is it the first step toward a revival of the Entente Cordiale? Or is it the guise through which the British government intends to present to the British people a policy of more specific commitments regarding peace and war with France? It is difficult to say at this time. The Pact of Trust has too clearly been part of a more complex bargain between France and England, and it is still too closely tied to the issue of German reparations and armaments to be able to determine the lasting political significance it may have. But, as I said at the outset, rather than a Franco-British rapprochement, it represents the recognition that, in order to resolve European problems, the most appropriate course of action must be based on a preliminary agreement between England and France.

Even within these limits, the Pact of Trust already weakens our position vis-à-vis France; it already suggests to France that the path toward an alliance with Britain remains open; it already encourages France to pursue its efforts to reestablish the Entente Cordiale, rather than turning to us in search of a fair and satisfactory solution to Franco-Italian relations that would guarantee and unite the interests of the two countries in the face of Germany. Only in the future will we know whether these efforts will succeed in stabilizing England's currently shifting position, and whether the interests that England shares with France in the stability and preservation of the status quo will prevail over the essentially isolationist tendencies of the English people and overcome the sluggishness and complexity of the imperial machinery. In other words, only in the future will we be able to know exactly what the definitive significance of the Pact of Trust will be; but as it stands under current conditions, and from our point of view, it represents a force diverting us from the path on which we would like to set Franco-Italian relations.

It is all too evident that we will not be able to draw France into an alliance with us if it has the opportunity to reconstitute the Entente Cordiale on its own, so there is no need for me to dwell on this point. But there are two considerations that must be absolutely clear. One is that an increase in German power and aggression in Europe will necessarily be accompanied by a strengthening of Franco-British relations; the other is that a gradual strengthening of Franco-British relations will progressively limit our freedom of action toward France. For on the day that Germany, having restored its economic life and reestablished civil peace, begins to rebuild its imperial edifice on new foundations, and sends its ships across the ocean, forces its way into markets, raises an army, and looks greedily upon the small and weak countries surrounding it—which will fall prey to its strength—on the day that Germany reemerges in Europe withthe full force of its violent grandeur and its unbridled aggression, only then will England's now-dulled sense of the German threat be reawakened; and as Germany attempts to shake the edifice of Europe, England will inevitably cling to the only truly conservative force remaining on the Continent—namely, France. On that day, we ourselves—threatened as we will be by the resurgence of German power, which will press upon our Alps, and by the renewal of Franco-British cooperation, which will press upon the Mediterranean—will have no choice; we will either have to bind ourselves definitively to Germany, or our rapprochement with France will then take place under conditions of necessity and disadvantage that will deprive us of any real ability to negotiate.

Even from the perspective of Franco-British relations, it is necessary that our rapprochement with France—if this is truly among the general objectives of our foreign policy—take place before the resurgence of the German Empire transforms, across the English Channel and in the Alps, the essential conditions under which the problem currently stands.

V) This naturally also implies a review of our relations with the Danubian countries allied with France.

It is a widely held view that these relations are entirely dependent on Franco-Italian relations, and that once we have reached an agreement with France, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Romania will be compelled to come to terms with us. Indeed, there are those who go even further: those who believe that we will be able to negotiate with France on such advantageous terms as to compel France to choose between these Eastern alliances and us, and that France, in order to secure Italy's friendship and cooperation, will loosen its ties with Yugoslavia and leave it alone and indebted, to settle the issues we have with it in the Adriatic. We will then be able—so it is said—with much less effort and a much greater likelihood of success, to break up the Little Entente, and—by leveraging Croatian separatism—to dismantle Yugoslav unity, thereby securing the security and freedom on our eastern borders that our allies denied us in 1919.

This is not the place to examine this issue, nor whether the dissolution of Yugoslav unity is a practically attainable goal and whether such an endeavor could truly bring benefits to Italy. It is difficult to interest the Croats in a separatist policy without guaranteeing them ports on the Adriatic—which are now in Yugoslavia's hands—and by guaranteeing them these ports, one of the primary reasons, indeed the most essential one, for which we might be led to support their movement would be nullified. Moreover, once independent, Croatia would either turn to Hungary—and the very problem we would have sought to resolve by dissolving the Yugoslav union would then resurface in a new Hungarian-Croatian union—or it would seek, against Italy, the protection of the Great Powers; and, being weaker than Yugoslavia and more exposed, it would be compelled to give this new dependence the character of vassalage that the Franco-Yugoslav alliance currently lacks. The most immediate result of the dissolution of Yugoslav unity would therefore be to create a small state on our borders, which would either be a vassal of France or, unable to defend itself, would fall under the blows that Germany will attempt to inflict on the current political structure of Danubian Europe.

In reality, the issue of our relations with the states of the Little Entente—and in particular with Yugoslavia—cannot be addressed outside the context of our relations with Germany. If Germany prepares to resume, on the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, its march toward southeastern Europe, it will be German policy—far more than Central European policy—that we will feel weighing against us in the Danube Valley and on the right bank of the Adriatic. Today, Germany has—and can have—only one agenda: to open the way to the Balkans through the annexation of Austria. Once Austria is absorbed, this agenda will become irresistible. With Austria, the Germans will not only have secured a geographical base for their expansion, but they will also become the heirs to an imperial tradition—not yet entirely extinguished—in the Danube Valley. Not only will they have materially increased their strength, but they will have regained control of the old economic and cultural structure—not yet entirely dissolved—of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Not only will Germany effectively be present at the Brenner Pass and in Vienna, but also in Budapest and Zagreb, in the Julian Alps and along the Adriatic, wherever there are still Austrian populations and traditions, wherever German is still the language of culture and commerce, and wherever people still yearn for the benefits of imperial unity, as well as the order, good administration, and prestige of the old Empire.

In the years ahead, we will have to confront the unfolding of this program, which, in its initial phase, we can reasonably imagine as aimed at the absorption of Austria, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, and a more or less veiled and indirect undermining of Hungarian independence. Must we—or can we—stand idly by as these objectives are achieved? Will we allow Germany to dismantle the structure of the Danubian states for its own benefit? And with what forces? With what alliances? By fostering and sustaining what elements of resistance?

The only states on which we can rely to resist a resumption of the German advance on Danubian

Europe are, ultimately, the states of the Little Entente. The policy of these states toward Austria and Hungary could not have been more foolish or more crude than it has been, and they are largely responsible for the pan-Germanist tendencies in Vienna and Budapest; yet it is nonetheless on their cooperation that every practical possibility of defending the independence of Austria and Hungary rests. This is true not only in a negative sense—for if Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania were to pursue a policy of agreements with Germany, Austria and Hungary would inevitably be sacrificed for the sake of the benefits of German friendship—but also in a positive sense, because the cooperation of the states of the Little Entente has proven absolutely indispensable for resolving the fundamental problems of the Danube Basin.

Of course, the problem would present itself in an entirely different light if there were any practical possibility of guaranteeing Austrian independence through an agreement between us and Germany. But such a possibility does not exist. Even if Germany were persuaded to establish a system of political and economic agreements with us and with Hungary to preserve Austria's independence, the role Germany would play in the practical implementation of these agreements would still be predominant, and we would have to either resign ourselves to a position of clear inferiority in the Danube Basin or rush to destroy—by seeking the aid of the Little Entente states—the very system that we ourselves would have created, to our own detriment and to the peril of our interests.

We will therefore inevitably be driven toward an agreement with the states of the Little Entente. This was already evident last summer, when we had to join forces with France and Czechoslovakia to defend Austria's independence against the Customs Union project; but it will become even more evident in the coming years, when Germany—now freed from the burden of reparations and having strengthened its economic and political structure—will resume its expansionist policy along the Danube with greater determination and vigor. It will then be Germany that attempts to dissolve the bonds of the Little Entente, to separate Poland from France's Danubian allies, to shatter Yugoslav unity in order to undermine Hungarian claims, to make these claims its own, to expand the scope of its policy, and to strengthen and facilitate its efforts at subversion and domination in Central Europe. After all, we must not forget that while the Little Entente is united in a policy of upholding the Treaties, the interests of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania in the face of the German problem are not identical. Only for Czechoslovakia is the Anschluss truly a matter of life and death. In an initial phase —that is, during the purely Austrian phase of its expansionist policy—Germany, by promising to sacrifice Hungary's revisionist interests for their sake, may attempt to win over Yugoslavia and Romania; and only after breaking up the Little Entente will it turn the program of Hungarian claims against them.

We will then be obliged to defend and uphold the unity of the Little Entente, and to align Yugoslav and Romanian interests with the defense of Austrian independence; and, pressed by the course of events and by Germany's growing strength, we will have to sacrifice Hungarian interests, thereby definitively casting Hungary into the German camp.

There seems to be no doubt, therefore, that it is in our interest to clarify and review our relations with the Little Entente before Germany begins its policy of expansion along the Danube. Nor is there any reason why we should proceed in this matter in concert with France. It is not in our interest to make our relations with the Little Entente dependent on our relations with France; on the contrary, it is in our interest to keep the two issues separate and not to enter into negotiations with France until we have first reached a cordial understanding with Yugoslavia. It may be more difficult to negotiate with Yugoslavia while it is an ally of France and Italian-French relations are so murky and uncertain, but it is infinitely more burdensome to negotiate with France under a Franco-Yugoslav alliance and with Yugoslavia as

our enemy. France will either demand that we mend our ties with Yugoslavia—in which case we will have to reevaluate Italian-Yugoslav relations under unfavorable conditions—or it will regard the Italian-Yugoslav rapprochement as its own achievement, in which case we will have to pay for that rapprochement twice: once to France and once to Yugoslavia. The possibility that France might sacrifice Yugoslavia to us cannot even be considered, because Yugoslavia is an essential element of the plan to isolate and encircle Germany, and once we have committed ourselves to supporting this plan, we ourselves will have no interest in throwing Yugoslavia into Germany's arms.

In order to reshape our foreign policy as required following the Lausanne Conference, we must, in fact, begin precisely with our relations with Yugoslavia. We must indeed begin by reexamining these relations in light of what will inevitably be the guiding principles of our policy in Central Europe; driven as we already are—and will be even more so in the future—toward a silent struggle with Germany, to block its path first to Vienna and then to the Balkans.

To resist Germany, we must first and foremost—that is, even before turning to an alliance with France—establish a base of operations in Danubian Europe that will make us more independent and stronger in relation to France itself. It would be foolish and imprudent, in order to establish this base, to abandon Austria and Hungary to the crass greed of the countries of the Little Entente. On the contrary, we must do the opposite: we must seek to alleviate the pressure of the Little Entente on them by awakening in Prague, Belgrade, and Bucharest a sense of the German threat and of Germany's boundless claims, and by dispelling fears of the Habsburg threat and Hungarian claims. However, to do this, we must still give the Little Entente—if we want it to become a bulwark and defense of our interests against German expansionism—the assurance and confidence of our friendship.

VI) But once we have set out on this path, will we not have to renounce our revisionism? Will we not have to reverse the premises of our policy and switch, lock, stock, and barrel, to a policy of upholding the Treaties? Will it be possible to reconcile our revisionist premises with an Italian-French alliance and, indeed, with a policy of collaboration between Italy and the Little Entente?

In reality, our revisionism with regard to Italy has always had—and continues to have—a specific purpose: to revise the distribution of colonial territories to our advantage. In Europe, our revisionism has served to exert political pressure on France, not to satisfy any of our own needs. When speaking of revising the Treaties, our focus has always been on Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, the unfair distribution of mandates that took place at the Paris Conference, and the conditions of inferiority in which Italy finds itself compared to the other victorious Great Powers.

We have always believed that it was useful to stir up and amplify the German threat in Europe, so that France would be forced to revise the colonial situation in our favor. We must not lose sight of this perspective on the Italian problem. It is neither the Germans of Silesia nor the Hungarians of Transylvania who concern us. It is the Italians who must be given land and work, fields to cultivate and markets to exploit. Whether it be Syria or Cameroon, we have our own "revision" that is of pressing importance to us. The others will have to look out for themselves.

Now, the serious problem that has arisen before us—from the Austro-German Customs Union proposal to the Lausanne Conference—is that a resurgence of German power that is too rapid and too violent might cause the more immediate and urgent demands of European security to take precedence over Italy's colonial needs, and the Lausanne Conference has heightened, not weakened, this danger. Germany emerged from the Lausanne Conference freer and stronger, while France emerged more secure. In the coming months, it will become clear whether the process of rebuilding the Entente

Cordiale will proceed more rapidly than the process of rebuilding Imperial Germany, and whether, faced with the resurgence of Germany's economic, political, and military power, England will feel the need to align itself more closely with France. But in the meantime—caught between the danger of the Anschluss and the danger of the Pact of Trust—we must immediately set about vigorously rebuilding our foreign policy, while we are still in a position to do so, and before Imperial Germany forces us into positions of necessity in which we will be compelled to sacrifice the vital needs of our expansion.

7. Interviews and visits with Mussolini (1931, 1934).

VISIT BY V. BRANCATI (JUNE 1931)

Mussolini will receive me on the evening of June 16 at Palazzo Venezia.

On the 14th, I leave Catania with a suitcase that seems to me to be entirely filled with that special copy of *Everest*, which I must deliver to him.

There is no moon. The journey glides through a semi-deserted darkness. I share my cabin with a truly nocturnal traveler: one of those men whom, at times, we'd like to substitute for our cumbersome, boisterous companions, with the same pleasure one feels when turning off the red lamp and turning on the blue one. If I lean my face out the narrow porthole, I get the impression that the scent of orange blossoms flutters like a strong, white fabric.

Sicily is slipping away slowly, mysteriously, and reminds me of a family of guests—tall and with red hands—who came to stay at my house when I was a child, and then, after speaking in riddles all night long, and shifting about, and rinsing their mouths, and calling out to someone from the window, they left by sea.

Mount Etna twists and turns in the blue sky, but does not move. The sea swells from all sides. The scent of orange blossoms now vaguely resembles the smell of a convent duck.

I doze off, with the sensation of resting my cheek on a stone carved with the words: "The first time I see Mussolini, face to face." I wake up because the letter "I" in the word "Mussolini" pricks my temples.

"What a strange dream!" I say to myself. My traveling companion has become even more drab, more hunched over, more motionless: his eyes are open, but they're eyes in name only—they might as well be two fireflies.

"What does the presence on earth of such an opaque man," I ask myself silently, "and of another like

Mussolini, mean?”

For some time now, humanity has loomed larger in my eyes like a universal ladder—the greatest thing we truly know. We speak of creators and created things; but of creators, in this world, we have seen nothing but the father and the mother; of created things, we have seen nothing but the children. If God speaks to us, He does so through human beings. In one of my plays, *Was the Passenger in Sleeping Car No. 7 Perhaps God?*, someone says: “He [God] speaks to us, at times, through the mouth of a child. He appears in the form of a mysterious traveler. The universe is full of His transfigurations.”

Whether these words are true or not, we must always have infinite respect for human beings and know how to distinguish, with a keen ear, the superhuman tones in their voices.

I find Rome closed off, compact in its stifling heat. Bodies have a singular weight and isolation: women and monuments resemble one another.

At night, I feel as though I’m sleeping with my cheek on a pillow full of swallows, so many are the chirps, screeches, and trills I hear.

I wake up at dawn. The air has grown milder.

I know that, in the morning, Mussolini, in a white blouse, rides along the boulevards of Rome.

The deserted light better isolates his image. I think, “I’ll see him soon.”

In fact, toward evening, I go to Palazzo Venezia. An usher already knows my name and directs me to a butler, who guides me up the grand staircase and, encouraged by my boyish appearance, congratulates me warmly in a low voice, since “it’s the first time the President has received a young man… so young.”

I enter a waiting room adorned with nineteenth-century paintings and Roman ceramics.

A small balcony opens onto a tiny, secluded terrace, where I wouldn’t be surprised to see an extraordinary procession strolling in two rows—the men dressed in black, the women in white. A romantic scene: “A Sentimental Stroll of the Doves.”

Then evening falls.

I feel, with overwhelming clarity, that Mussolini is to the east, in that silent palace, where everything that is the face, appearance, and existence of other men—and is not him—shines dimly, glows poorly, goes unnoticed.

Shortly afterward, a voice: “Vitaliano Brancati!”—and an usher guides me through a series of rooms, at the end of which a closed white door glows.

The door grows larger, stands out on its own, draws nearer, and at the same time recedes, as if, in a moment, it were to slip from one’s grasp, remaining forever to the right or left of the gesture with which one intends to open it.

Instead, it opens, and I see Mussolini.

The entire room around him glows—the floor, the dark furniture, the walls—and for a moment one has the impression that it is meant to mirror him. But his figure is large, alone, unique, in the room, amid these reflections that never materialize, amid this futile desire to mirror him that lies in the things around him. (I think of a painting: “The Decline of Mirrors,” and in this thought I lose some of my trepidation).

I say hello and pause.

Mussolini steps away from the window and, in a voice unfamiliar to me—so soft is it—says: “Come in, Brancati! I know you… I’ve read your work. What have you been up to lately?”

I step closer; I speak.

I feel the room behind me, like a void that draws me closer to that massive figure of a man, almost like the sea to an island.

I also feel Italy, swirling all around me, near and far, an immense wheel whose axis lies right there in the room, just a few steps away from me. Rome is the first spoke of that wheel.

Mussolini asks about my work. He likes the title of the novel I’m about to publish: *The Winner’s Friend*. He tells me he’ll read it and then let me know what he thinks. Then he talks to me about the new artists. He’s read a large number of novels published this year. Of one—which is among those I haven’t read—he recounts the plot to me, with the dryness of someone who squeezes and reduces an object that’s too unnecessarily bulky to the size of his fist. He offers some remarks on Tombari’s *La vita*, remarks of extraordinary quality.

Among other things, he tells me that “Rome is four cities” and that anyone who reduces it to the interior of a frivolous drawing room or to a conversation among society girls is deluding themselves.

But he doesn’t speak only of the living. Now he recalls Fausto Maria Martini, who, shortly before his death, told him that he would write a broad, expansive work—he, too, moved by a sense of the grand.

Then he asks me if I am concerned with form and quotes a thought by Anatole France. He asks me what method I follow to organize characters and details before writing; and he teaches me the methods of Balzac, Tolstoy, and Zola, clearly sympathizing with the work of these giants, who themselves moved vast masses of people.

As he speaks—now leaning on the table, now standing upright—with a simplicity of exquisite civil elegance, I think of all the clichés that have sprung up around him.

I think, first and foremost, of those who, at any cost, want to see in Mussolini the shadow of Napoleon, the gesture of Napoleon.

The harshest insult one can level at a great modern man—a self-made man—is to compare him to another, however colossal, from a different era or even the same era. Strong personalities are personalities precisely because they do not imitate others; they are born with entirely new, rarely seen, and unmistakable traits. Mussolini resembles a nineteenth-century figure—half romantic, half ostentatious, adorned with a saber and ravaged by tuberculosis, still not recovered from the feverish

dreams of the bourgeois who both hates and adores blue blood, a violent deifier of his own family and confusingly preoccupied with the muddled “rights of man,” a dreamer of an empire and the unwitting creator of nationalisms, clear and bitter in his greatness—Napoleon Bonaparte, just as an oak resembles a pine or an August flower resembles a May flower.

There he is, Mussolini, in his summer jacket, with his warm and calm voice.

At this moment, he is resting from what he came to do in the world. Tonight he will sleep, a sleep that is surely deep and youthful, but what he will do tomorrow lies in the hands of Fate. And since I, too, will take part in the whirlwind, in the greatness of tomorrow—as an Italian and as a writer—I look at his forehead, and, despite its simplicity and tranquility, for a moment I see it as a folded map of time, a severity of the future.

Yet, beneath that simplicity of a modern man, another simplicity lies hidden: the smooth clarity of an exceptional and powerful personality; the exterior of a man who will never be dominated—an exterior without a foothold, lofty, almost monotonous, which is futile to attempt to scale.

And so this man, in a loose-fitting summer jacket, presents himself as a monolith. A single, unbroken piece: but if such a piece stands in a room, the room seems to revolve around him; if he stands in the midst of a crowd, the crowd surges and boils around him; if he stands in the midst of a people, the people form a circle around him, arrange themselves in pyramids, and spontaneously accept him as their apex… Meanwhile, in the far reaches of the world, the ebb occurs—the reverse movement of those who, jolted in one direction, move in the opposite direction to regain balance; and the regret of not seeing him, and the suspicion, and the fear, and the strange possibility of not being affected by it, given the distance, provoke for a moment, in distant lands, the undulation of adversity.

Mussolini asks me now if, in my opinion, Everest can be depicted.

I tell him: “Outdoors.”

- Why?

- It’s a work based on the essence of the high mountains, on the vertigo that becomes the norm. Only outdoors can all of this be conveyed. With substantial resources, it’s possible to create a classical spectacle, sculpted with a mythical quality, concluding with a dance… I would change the ending, replacing it with an ascent of the Alps.

He tells me he’ll reread *Everest* and let me know afterward…

I leave the room; before going out, I turn around and say goodbye.

Mussolini is at the back.

I sense the novelty of the times with singular precision. I think of all the things that have died and have not yet been removed.

It has been believed until now—I don’t know how—that the pride and duty of every individual lie in not recognizing any other individual, in not sympathizing, in not coming to an agreement.

Everyone has adopted a phrase from someone who lived in Napoleon’s time:

“I admire him, but that is precisely why I hate him.”

Is it possible that all this was true? And that such a phrase was so widely appreciated?

An abundance of personalities, recognizing others, believing—in oneself and in one’s own world—that there is room for other personalities. Since it is entrusted to us to acknowledge individual greatness, even when it is foreign to us, how much pride, how much strength, how much tenderness there is in saying: “He is a strong man, and I love him.”

After all, the phrase: “I admire him, and that is precisely why I hate him”—that is the words of a petty, irritable woman, the Queen of Naples.

The hero at any cost—the rebellious nineteenth-century hero—is a being who is quite frail in his violence. Like someone who does not know a language, he is always alarmed, irritable, and suspects that every word spoken by others is an offense against him.

I was born in an age of suffocation.

I remember that there was nothing to do; that as a child I sat in a world where everything seemed over, and the doubt about living was so great that it even took away the thought of death.

He—the man I saw a few minutes ago—appeared as a new meaning of life.

I am not quite sure who he is, and I do not judge him historically—partly because his work is not yet complete… But he is certainly a meaning of life; and something speaks through him that makes me start.

Ever since I took in his physical form, a great rumbling has remained in my memory, like that of a spring.

Unknown forces have stirred within me. The times are swelling; and, since times do not exist, my soul is swelling.

Why shouldn’t literature be renewed?

8. Fascist Movements Around the World (1934).

ARGENTINA.

In June 1932, posters appeared in Buenos Ayres [sic] announcing the formation of the Argentine Fascist Party. The movement was initiated by legionnaires of the “Legion Civica,” formed during the Uriburu presidency to support the Justo-Rosca candidacy, and was joined by certain conservative elements who appear to have assumed its leadership. The party’s headquarters were moved to Avellaneda, a suburb of Buenos Ayres, after the office on Via Larrea—the seat of the General Secretariat of the Argentine Fascist Party—was closed following demonstrations in the capital.

Mr. Umberto Bianchetti served as head of the Avellaneda branch of the Fascist Party. The name of Mr. Umberto Bianchetti, as a member of the Argentine Fascist movement, first appeared in 1932, during the election campaign for the presidency of the Republic.

When Count Bolasco founded—also in 1932—a branch of the Fascio Italiano in Avellaneda, Bianchetti’s name appeared on the committee formed for that candidacy.

Bianchetti is an admirer of Italian fascism and the lofty ideals that inspire it. It is said that the walls of his home are covered with portraits of His Excellency the Head of Government. Bianchetti combines this enthusiasm with a certain liveliness of intellect and common sense, especially in business matters; however, this is offset by a modest level of education: in fact, he has never spoken at conferences or public rallies, nor has he ventured into journalism.

It can be said that Bianchetti generally lacks the positive qualities that would make him a leading figure in a political movement; his influence extends only to the small group of members of the Argentine Fascist organization in Avellaneda, a small town on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, and there is no indication that his activities could extend beyond this center, which, in any case, is quite limited.

Many individuals—apparently not among the best in Avellaneda—have also joined the movement. The commander of the squadristi is Ugo V. Passalacqua. Other leaders include Luigi Cinella, Rodolfo Pontieri, and A. Scotti.

In Bahía Blanca, too, some young people began—though without significant results—active and covert propaganda efforts to establish an Argentine Fascio. They publish a newspaper titled *Camicia Negra*, with anti-Semitic leanings.

In January 1934, Argentine fascism suffered its first two victims: Leonardo Simoni and Gerolamo Pugliese, who were stabbed by communists in Avellaneda.

AUSTRALIA

The Australian fascist organization is called “New Guard” and is in contact with Sir Mosley, the leader of British fascism. Senator Collings, speaking to workers in Port Pirie, declared that if liberalism does not come to power in South Australia, the struggle between the fascists and the revolutionaries will continue.

AUSTRIA

The first fascist movement was officially established with the formation of the “Patriotic Front” (Vaterlandischen Front), which aims for a unified, corporatist organization of the state above the parties and excludes any concept of elections, replacing it with the principle of appointment by the supreme authority. The President of the “Patriotic Front” is Chancellor Dollfuss; the Vice President is Prince Starhemberg, assisted by two executive committees. Membership is estimated at 800,000.

The Agrarian Party (Landbund), of which former Vice Chancellor Winkler is Vice President, also wished to make its contribution; on its own initiative, the “National Corporate United Front” was formed, which is to be composed of parties, associations, and organizations that seek to abolish the class struggle and that, rejecting all revolutionary ideologies, accept the principle of representation of the factors of production as the basis for parliamentary and state reform. The Corporate Union for Industry and Commerce and the National Union of Employees and Civil Servants have joined.

Finally, the Heimwehren—that is, the numerous right-wing militarized associations formed to combat the armed organizations of the socialists and communists—though they did not originally have a clearly defined political program, are increasingly aligning themselves with the fascist spirit. Their leader, Prince Starhemberg, advocates for a state organization of Austria modeled on the Italian regime. In his speech on September 15, 1933, at the Prater in Vienna, Chancellor Dollfuss declared that Austria must become “a Christian and social state based on a corporatist system and under the leadership of an authoritarian but not arbitrary government.” As a result of this program, right-wing elements (Heimwehr) were strengthened within the Cabinet, and the post of Vice Chancellor was assigned to Major Fey, a member of the Heimwehr.

The struggle for and against fascism took place in February 1934 against the Social Democrats, who had made massive preparations throughout Austria and were heavily armed and well-supplied with ammunition. The uprising, quelled during the violent days in Vienna—where Vice Chancellor Fey, as chief of police, and the Heimwehren, which had been incorporated into the defense forces and suffered the heaviest losses, distinguished themselves—paved the way for fascist reforms. The constitutional reform is intended to establish the fascist state through the dissolution of all political parties.

The appointment of four special commissioners for tourism, propaganda, youth education, and civil servants is intended to root out “National Socialism” from the bureaucracy.

The establishment of the Corporate Committee—with advisory functions and national objectives, comprising delegates appointed by the provinces and representatives of trades and professions—is intended to pave the way for the advent of a corporatist system.

In the federal states, provisional provincial governments have meanwhile been formed, with the participation of the Heimwehren through direct appointment by the Federal Government.

Under the new constitution, the name “Republic of Austria” would disappear, and the title of the

federal state would simply become “Austria,” consisting of the city of Vienna—which would be directly subordinate to the state—and the individual federal states.

The new constitution itself provides for an Upper House and a Lower House, the latter of which is tasked with reviewing bills drafted by the government and is divided into four legislative bodies: 1) Staatsrat (State Council); 2) Wirtschaftskammer (for economic matters); 3) Kulturkammer (for cultural matters); 4) Landerkammer (composed of provincial captains).

The government would retain the authority to issue Notgesetze, or emergency decrees. Regarding the appointment of provincial captains, there is a struggle between those favoring direct appointment by the government and those favoring government exequatur. The same applies to the election of the President of the Confederation, which could take place by plebiscite or through the Landerkammer—that is, indirectly by the provincial captains. The President’s powers would be more extensive, to the point of conferring upon him almost royal prerogatives.

There would be eight guilds: 1) landowners; 2) mining companies and miners, industrialists, and railroad workers; 3) merchants; 4) artisans; 5) banks and independent professionals; 6) civil servants and public employees; 7) private-sector employees; 8) any group not included in the preceding six categories.

BELGIUM

The “Belgian National Legion” was formally organized in 1933 in Brussels, with branches in Liège, Vernier, and Antwerp. Legionnaires wear helmets, dark blue shirts, and carry canes.

In January 1934, a large demonstration in the capital led to a clash with the “Young Socialist Guards,” resulting in several injuries and arrests. Left-wing organizations denounced the “rapid progress of the fascist movement.”

The Legionnaires protested against the reinstatement into the state administration of officials “dismissed for lack of civic-mindedness” during the war.

Statements with fascist overtones were made by Mr. Crockers at the Catholic Congress in Dinant, by Mr. Serges, Minister of State, on the same occasion, by various speakers at the Christian Democratic Congress in Ghent, and by Catholic conservatives.

The Christian Democrats propose “an economy organized on a professional basis in which the state would exercise a regulatory and supervisory function, underpinned by employers’ and workers’ associations, then by Professional Councils with official status, and finally by a Central Council.” In the Flemish region, the Dinasos movement has developed, led by the 35-year-old former deputy Van Severeu, who as early as 1926 had outlined a program of action inspired by fascism at a student congress.

They call for an authoritarian state with a corporatist organization and a Council of State that would replace Parliament. The first Dinasos congress was held in Roeselare in July 1932: the movement's political wing has 135 chapters with 3,000 members, while the labor union wing is larger; the militia numbered about a thousand young people led by Reserve officers and former Army noncommissioned officers. The movement intended to have its headquarters in Brussels at the "Green House" but had not yet managed to carry out this plan.

In early April 1934, during the inauguration of the new headquarters of the Belgian National Legation in Brussels, scuffles broke out and people were injured. The new leaders—Vanden Bossche, Hoornaert, and Ms. Van Tieghen, group leader of the "Legionary Women"—appeared on the scene for the first time.

BRAZIL

Predating the current movements was the so-called "Tenentismo," a regionally based movement that shared power with the old parties from 1930 onward. It was a movement inspired by fascist sentiments but was far from being an imitation of Fascism.

Today, there are two fascist parties in Brazil: one is based in Rio de Janeiro and is called the National Fascist Party, under the leadership of Mr. Fabrinho (Ação Social Brasileira); the other is active primarily in São Paulo and is the "integralism" of Plínio Salgado (Ação Integralista Brasileira). Professor Gustavo Barroso also belongs to the latter and is its most erudite and respected figure.

An antagonism is emerging and developing between the two movements: the Rio movement seeks to appeal to the masses, while the São Paulo movement seeks to attract intellectuals. The provisional government is undecided: Getulio Vargas and the conservatives in the government favor the intellectuals because they are considered harmless; Osvaldo Aranha and João Alberto favor Salgado, considering him more capable and energetic: both movements draw heavily on Fascism. The majority of members of both movements were recruited from among the children of Italians, so that the two Brazilian fascist movements were imbued with Italian spirit, name, and blood. One hundred and ten journalists signed a manifesto addressed to intellectuals in the name of Brazilian Social Action, advocating the advent of fascism in a disciplined, prosperous, and morally reformed nation.

Salgado's integralist movement, on the other hand, accuses the reactionary and anti-worker parties of masquerading as fascists; it defines itself as a "revolutionary current," acknowledging that it "has much in common with fascist doctrine" and that it "guarantees the human rights that cannot be relinquished for the sake of human dignity," and declares itself "opposed to the transformation of Social Action into a police matter." Integralism aims to be the regime of workers and intellectuals united against political opportunists and politicians.

Another leader besides Salgado is Madeira Freitas, who has stated that integralism means: "a total transformation of the political mindset" stemming from the 1930 revolution—which has now come to a halt—and that this transformation must continue.

The integralist fascists wear the “olive green” shirt and consider it a “Garibaldian” tradition. This party, which can be said to have been founded in Rome, seems destined for a bright future, but its leader lacks great qualities and its platform is a poor imitation of Italian Fascism. The party abstained from the last elections. It combats the influence of the clergy but affirms religious values. It has few registered members—perhaps 2,000—but many spiritual adherents among the youth, who are, however, scattered and of mediocre caliber. Integralism cannot transform itself into true Fascism unless it first succeeds in unifying the national spirit.

The typically Italian institution of the Militia is being called for in various parts of Brazil, where there is support for the need to create, for example, a “Federal Street Militia.”

BULGARIA

The Bulgarian Fascist Party—“Nazionalna Zadruga Fascista”—founded in 1931, has reached 25,000 members in about two years. Attorney Alessandr Stalyiski, the Party’s leader, has stated that today, not only in the major cities but also on the walls of farmhouses scattered throughout the mountains, the word “Fascism” and the name “Mussolini” are written in large letters. The Fascist ideology is gaining ever greater traction in Bulgaria, to the point that it has been able to defeat, on several occasions, long-established parties whose positions seemed unassailable.

Attorney Stalyiski came to Italy to gather material on land reclamation projects and other grandiose undertakings of the regime, with the aim of compiling, in a book to be titled *Ten Years of Fascism*, documentation of the colossal work accomplished by the Duce.

Former Minister Kazasoff, president of the “Zveno” Party, held a lecture on Fascism at the party’s headquarters, making an explicit declaration of admiration and sympathy for the Mussolini regime, which he considers the only one capable of governing countries whose citizens feel deep national pride but are led by ambitious and inept leaders and plagued by useless and destructive party struggles. With these statements, Kazasoff—who is the author of an interesting book on Fascism—announced his defection to the “Democraticosci Sgovor” party, led by former Prime Minister Tzankoff, whose programmatic ideas and action plans reveal a marked orientation toward Fascism. Youth organizations and patriotic groups in Bulgaria are rapidly rallying behind this party, bringing in a very significant number of members. Kazasoff is also the president of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav Committee.

CANADA

A telegram from Montreal to the Reuters News Agency in September 1933 reported that the Fascist Party had been officially established in Canada, bringing together the various fascist factions that had emerged in the country and which had recognized the need to merge into a single organization. Membership already stands at 25,000. The new party, led by Mr. Anaclète Chalifoux—a figure who has been the subject of much debate, including from a moral standpoint—has adopted the Brown Shirts' uniform and the Roman salute. As for its platform, it is linked to that of the Fascist Union of the New Empire, founded in London in August 1933 by representatives from England, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand, and which reportedly already has hundreds of thousands of members.

The Montreal organization has anti-Semitic tendencies and has urged the Premier of Quebec not to postpone the municipal elections beyond April 1934.

Prof. Norman McLeod Rogers of Queen's University in Kingston gave a lecture earlier this year on new forms of authoritarian government, and a better understanding of the fascist ideology is taking hold in the country.

In March 1933, the first convention of the National Social-Christian Party took place in Montreal; the party advocates the fight against socialism, Jews, and Freemasonry, and uses the national flag bearing a black swastika as its emblem.

The new movement declares its intention to collaborate with the fascists against the parliamentary democratic regime. The keynote speaker was Adrien Arcand, the party's leader. The party's official organ is the weekly newspaper *Le Patriote*.

CHILE

The Chilean Fascist Party, which already has 5,000 members in the Republic, draws its inspiration directly from Fascist doctrines. The leader of the Chilean Fascists is Mr. Gonzales; the leader of the action squads is Mr. Ortuzar. The party's official organ is the newspaper *Imparcial*.

The constant danger of civil and military uprisings aimed at seizing control of the government has led a great many citizens to form a republican militia, whose purpose is to maintain order in the country, above and beyond the political parties. This coalition of forces cannot yet be called the secret society "Fascism" in Havana, but it undoubtedly constitutes the prelude to a fascist movement and fertile ground for fascist propaganda, which has yielded rapid results.

Among the ranks of this militia—15,000 members of which marched through the streets of Santiago last October—calls for a local "Mussolini" to organize and discipline the country following the Italian example are extremely common

CHINA

The July 19, 1933, issue of the *Shanghai Evening Post* published a list of prominent figures from the Chinese political and military spheres whom a secret association—reportedly headed, according to rumors circulating in Canton, by Chiang Kai-shek, assisted by a 50-member council—intended to violently suppress.

This association, known as the “Blue Skirts,” is referred to in some foreign newspapers as the “Chinese Fascist Organization.” The association’s program aims to save the Chinese nation through the establishment of a strong central government, the abolition of unjust treaties, the elimination of corruption, the development of agriculture, the restoration of financial stability, the adoption of military conscription, and compulsory education. Many members of this organization belong to the Whampox Military Academy.

Some emissaries have been sent to Europe to study the doctrine and aspects of Fascism in Italy, as well as the movements inspired by it in other countries. Other emissaries are working domestically, especially within military and intellectual circles, to win new adherents to the doctrine. It appears that the organization also has special action squads.

Marshal Chang-Hsue-Liang was in Italy from May to December 1933.

Upon his return to China in December 1933, after a six-month stay on the Peninsula, he expressed his admiration for the Duce and for Italy’s prosperity, declaring that China could be revitalized only by a movement that resembled the Fascist movement in its enthusiasm and seriousness. The newspapers published a photograph of the Marshal’s son giving the Roman salute while wearing a Balilla uniform.

In Shanghai, the Corps of Indigenous and White Port Guards was established, with duties similar to those of our M.V.S.N.

CUBA

The Cubans have adopted the green shirt as their party uniform. The party exerts its political influence through two of its members who hold positions of power in Col. Mendieta’s government. The greatest obstacle to the party’s fascistization, however, seems to lie in the secretive nature of the association itself.

The current Cuban government is distinctly dictatorial in nature, with all powers effectively in the hands of the President of the Republic, Col. Mendieta, and the Chief of Staff, the former sergeant and current Colonel Fulgencio Batista, whom the September 1933 revolution against President De Cespedes and subsequent events have made the country’s rulers.

Interest in fascist doctrine—and especially in corporatist organization—arose in early 1933. The former Minister of the Republic of Cuba in Rome, José Izquierdo, who left Italy in November 1933, requested from the Royal Government extensive documentation on corporatism to present to Cuban political leaders, and his request was granted.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

A report dated April 17 from Prague, published in *Il Messaggero* on the 18th, reveals the following: “The Czech fascist weekly *Narodni Sjednoceni* has published an article on corporatism, stating that it should serve as the basis for the organization of states that are economically and socially underdeveloped due to the cancer of Semitic Marxism—such as Czechoslovakia.

“The newspaper adds that the idea of a society free from class struggle—expressed under the name of corporatism—reflects the aspiration toward a better, more just, and more humane social order. Anyone who objectively observes reality can see the beneficial effects of corporatism in political, economic, and social life. The awareness of a precise plan for solving the nation’s social problems gave Mussolini the strength to defeat the subversive elements that threatened Italy. Already, the Duce’s early interventions—aimed, in accordance with the corporatist principle, at eliminating class struggle—saved the country from the threat of social revolution. Those who doubt the great future of the regimes that have recently emerged as a reaction to the struggle between national economic forces are deceiving themselves, just as those who predicted the imminent end of the Fascist regime in Italy were deceiving themselves.”

DENMARK

In January 1934, Nazi agitation in Schleswig [sic] began to have repercussions throughout Denmark, where the movement is gaining ground. One of its leaders is a former officer, Lemlcke, editor of *Angriff* (The Attack), a Nazi publication. An officer of the General Staff reportedly said, “I find it logical that Nazism is making headway in Denmark, and I consider it desirable for the country to become part of a great Germanic Confederation that brings together all peoples of Germanic race and culture.”

To defend itself, the Radical-Socialist government has prepared: a bill banning certain political organizations, including Nazi groups; an amendment to the penal code; and new penalties against the sale and possession of weapons.

The leader of the Nazi groups in Northern Schleswig, Mr. Jens Lorenzen, in response to these proposed laws, disbanded the Corps, the “Mo ordinnanz” organizations, and the Navy assault units, while at the same time inviting all members to join a union called the “Schieswigske Kameradeschaft,” which is clearly pro-Hitler.

A report from Berlin dated April 5 reveals that the Danish fascist movement, which had remained in the shadows until now, has now publicly begun its activities.

It is called Nyt Seind (New Thought), and its founder is the well-known journalist and writer Harald Tandrup, who was formerly the political editor of the *Berlinsche Tidende*.

Tandrup publishes a periodical titled “The New Era.” The first issue contains a programmatic article from which it is clear that the movement is essentially fascist.

Unconfirmed reports indicate the existence of a fascist movement called Hjemmevaernet, allegedly led by Mr. Thomas Damsgaard Schimidt (Farimasgade 56, Copenhagen).

ESTONIA

Estonia is currently politically divided into two major camps: the ruling Democratic Party, supported by socialism; and Fascism (veterans, the Estonian People’s Fascist Party, and National Socialists). On October 14, 1933, the coalition of fascist forces called a “referendum” to submit a radical proposal to reform the national constitution in a distinctly fascist direction to a popular vote. The proposal was approved by the plebiscite with a strong majority.

Under this plan, the Head of State (Riigivanem)—who currently also serves as Prime Minister—will assume the office of President of the Republic for a term of four years, with powers commensurate with the requirements of state representation and the duties inherent in his high office. The purpose of this plan is to make the highest office of the state independent of the whims of political parties, which today can remove the holder from office through a vote of no confidence by a parliamentary majority.

Furthermore, the number of members of the Legislative Assembly (Riigikogu) will be reduced from 100 to 50, and the powers of the Legislative Assembly will be curtailed and partially transferred to the President of the Republic. This represents a first step toward the complete abolition of Parliament and its replacement with a corporatist body.

The struggle between the outdated democratic regime and the new fascist theories is intensifying in Estonia, but the problem of selecting the right people is a serious one.

The Estonian Fascist Party, led by Attorney Sirk, has been legally recognized by the Government of the Republic and publishes the newspaper *Herald* in Tartu. The new plebiscitary constitution took effect on January 24, 1934, heralded by 21 cannon shots at midnight on January 23. Prime Minister Pals has provisionally assumed the duties of President of the Republic. However, during the current month of

March, the situation changed due to fears of an attempted coup d'état by fascist and paramilitary organizations. In fact, Attorney Sirk was arrested on the 12th; the fascist publication *Votlus* was shut down following the proclamation of the "State of Defense" and the appointment of General Leidoner as supreme commander of the armed forces and internal defense. At the same time, the Veterans' Association was dissolved.

The expanded powers granted to the Head of State quickly turned against the very groups that had called for them.

Moreover, the situation has not yet been clarified.

FINLAND

The Fascist Lappist movement (which emerged in the winter of 1929–30 out of the urgent need to combat communism), led by Mr. Vihtori Kosola, has sent Representative Arne Somersalo—a former air force colonel and editor of *Ajan Sunta*, the movement's official newspaper—on a mission to Rome. Mr. Somersalo was the first to realize that Fascism was much better suited to the conditions and mentality of the Finnish people than National Socialism, and he actively promotes this view in his newspaper.

The Lappists do not yet form a party but a movement, and they are fighting for national unity against all parties; however, they are becoming increasingly "fascist" every day, consequently distancing themselves from the German movement. They have adopted the black shirt, begun organizing the youth, and given the movement a militia-like character.

Over the past year, the Lapist movement has focused on organizational work, remaining strictly within the bounds of the law for the time being. The government and the opposition press have lashed out violently against it, but no serious measures have been taken, which deprives the Lapists of the opportunity to act directly.

Through relentless propaganda, they are steadily gaining ground, but they lack a core of true political leaders. Even the parliamentary group has not made much of an impact; the only politically significant proposal is the one regarding the setting of minimum wages, which has secured benefits for the working class. The foundation of Lappism, however, remains the peasantry. Lappist sections reportedly have a total of 86,000 members, 30,000 of whom are militarily organized within the group known as the "Black Shirts" (muistopaitat).

There is also the youth organization of the "sinimuistat" (blue-blacks), which, however, has now been weakened by the government's opposition to any form of propaganda in schools. The number of members is considerable and exceeds that of the other parties; moreover, they lack a stable organizational structure.

The Lappists continue to recruit followers among conservatives, agrarians, and socialists and can count

on the support of all the commands of the National Militia, which holds the country's fate in its hands. They are gaining ever-increasing sympathy; the times are increasingly favorable to them; the youth, particularly students, are on their side.

Lappism is now completely detached from National Socialism and instead fully oriented toward Fascism. A steering committee is drafting a program for the reconstruction of the state along strictly corporatist lines, replacing the old "estates" of the Finnish constitution with modern "corporatist bodies." For now, the program has been outlined only in general terms. In early 1934, the Chamber of Deputies passed a vote that was clearly anti-Lappist against Fascist political agitation. Consequently, the government introduced a bill "to prevent incitement against the state and society"—a strongly reactionary measure that has led to a realignment of the political parties. On one side are now the Lappist Popular Party, which is gaining strength nationwide; on the other, the agrarian and left-wing parties, which are losing support in rural areas despite remaining strong in Parliament.

It can be said that all Finnish parties are on the defensive against the Lappist offensive, supported in part only by the conservative unionists. Meanwhile, in March, a law passed by a majority prohibited the wearing of black shirts.

There is also the Kalstian movement in Finland, mistakenly regarded as fascist, whereas it is a mere imitation of Hitlerism—and not the best kind at that. The Kalstians wear uniforms identical to those of the German Nazis; they have armbands bearing a swastika on a blue background, and their slogan is: "Awaken, Finland." They are few in number but have a great deal of money at their disposal for propaganda, likely coming from Germany. Their activities are not yet significant, nor is their leader, Kalsta—from whom the movement takes its name—a man capable of achieving anything of importance.

On April 6, 1933, the Chamber passed a law by a majority vote banning the wearing of black shirts until the end of 1936, while permitting insignia that, due to their small size, "are not likely to attract the attention of uninterested persons."

FRANCE

PRECEDENTS

Various pseudo-fascist movements have emerged and failed from 1926 to the present. One notable attempt, however, was that of Georges Valois, who—after being active in revolutionary syndicalism and then in the Catholic monarchist ranks of Action Française (where he made a name for himself as a writer)—conceived a sort of economically based fascism as a means of reforming politics and finance. The French fascist groups he led held their first congress in January 1927 and appointed him "President of the Superior Council of the Fascio and of the Financial Committee." Valois's fascism advocated for the "stabilizing bloc of the Latin powers" and Franco-German rapprochement. But Valois was fiercely

attacked by his former comrades in Action Française and was gradually discredited and ousted. His daily newspaper, the mouthpiece of fascism, and the associated publishing company went bankrupt, and with them the movement also came to an end.

THE PATRIOTIC YOUTH

The vast social and political movement based in Paris and with numerous branches in the provinces, known as the “Jeunesses Patriotes,” has experienced remarkable and rapid growth: its official organ is the newspaper “Le National,” which dedicates a column to workers in every issue.

The “Jeunesses Patriotes” program of social reforms, formulated by a “Workers’ Commission” composed of artisans, workers, clerks, and employers, was publicized in a manifesto proclaiming the necessity of the most urgent workers’ demands on the following grounds:

A sufficient basic wage, supplemented by a family allowance.

The assurance of a retirement free from poverty.

Social insurance implemented on a mutual aid basis and outside the scope of the state.

Paid annual leave.

Improved living conditions, both at work (safety in the workshops) and at home (spacious, healthy housing).

Protection of the French workforce.

Strict compliance with the eight-hour workday law in all countries.

The “Jeunesses Patriotes” also intend to provide the country with a social constitution based on:

Corporate and professional organization.

Permanent joint arbitration committees, composed of white-collar and blue-collar workers, who alone are qualified to resolve conflicts.

A permanent, joint trade organization to study and implement all necessary reforms.

A professional chamber of workers and employers, which the government is required to consult.

The organized forces of French patriotic youth would be divided as follows: 30,000 members of the “Solidarité Française,” founded by

Coty, with 180,000 members, 80,000 of whom are in Paris, and among them 150 men organized into assault squads, wearing blue shirts, gray pants, blue caps, and bearing the emblem “the red rooster.”

THE NEW FRONT

The sensational Baiona Bank scandal of December 1933 helped strengthen the various political movements which, inspired by Fascism, are pushing for a radical reform of the state and its institutional and administrative bodies. The press lashes out violently against the decadence and corruption of the parliamentary regime: thus the Alsatian “Staatsreform,” the movement’s organ, “The New Front,” which declares that parliament and the government are a national danger to be eliminated and calls for an authoritarian republic; and the Catholic papers “Elsaesserkurier” of Colmar and “Voix d’Alsace et de Lorraine,” which accuse the current regime of having no ambition other than to govern. In private meetings, including one in Strasbourg chaired by the journalist

Armbruster, it was proclaimed that popular sovereignty serves only to deceive the people and that it is necessary to sweep away the now-decayed parliamentary regime.

Under the auspices of the Society of Jurists of Alsace and Lorraine, Prof. Laufenburger gave a lecture on “Italian Corporatism.” The sound film “Mussolini Speaks” was screened and received widespread and favorable coverage in the local press.

NEO-FASCISM

The press has wrongly labeled as “neo-fascist” or “national socialist” the dissident movement led by the deputies Montagnon, Marquet, Déat, and Renaudel, which has recently emerged within the French Socialist Party. In reality, the movement has only a few references to fascist doctrine; it proclaims its intention to rely on the strength of youth to change the system of government—since parliamentarism has run its course—and to believe in democracy but not in the current form of French demagoguery.

Finally, the National Socialist Party, led by former Ambassador Hennesy, has established the doctrine of French fascism in an anti-parliamentary and corporatist sense; it denounces the “great hypocrisy” of the democratic and liberal ideal, the tyranny of the Second and Third Internationals, and the uncertainty of all existing political parties, and condemns class struggle and the careerism of politicians. The French “social-national” fascists would like to revise the law on the granting of nationality, reserving naturalization solely for the demographic composition of France—not through a legal fiction but through moral regeneration.

FRANCISM

In February 1934, the new movement known as “Francisme” was founded in Paris by the former combatant Marcel Bucard. In an appeal to the people, it declared itself anti-parliamentary. It adopted the “blue shirt,” the Roman salute, and as its emblem the fasces with two joined axes facing a cogwheel.

Large, orderly crowds of “Francists” participated peacefully and without causing any incidents in the popular demonstrations of February 1933 against the Daladier government. Long columns composed of many thousands of young people and veterans, led by the head of “Francisme,” Bucard, marched down the boulevards in perfect formation, greeted by the crowd’s obvious sympathy.

THE CROSSES OF FIRE

Also last February, following the assassination of Magistrate Prince—who was linked to the Stawiski affair—an organization among young nationalists known as the “Crosses of Fire,” corresponding to our Arditi, came to light; membership in central Paris is growing at a rate of 400 per day.

Members are trained in the use of machine guns and are reportedly preparing to storm Masonic lodges.

The “Crosses of Fire” reportedly have 35,000 members, with 1,200–1,500 “always available” upon call, and a squad of 400 “national volunteers” for street demonstrations in Paris.

FASCISM IN ALSACE

The Union Populaire Républicaine in Strasbourg aims to create a corporatist system, through which, alongside political bodies, the country’s economic forces will also be called upon to engage in responsible collaboration. The organ of the pro-fascist movement, *Staatsreform*, advocates its own corporatist program defined as “The Authoritarian Corporatist Republic.” Professor Laufemburger of that university gave a lecture in Wissemburg, in which he outlined the work of the Italian government, expressed doubt that Hitler might follow its example, and drew France’s attention to corporatism.

Local politics in the border departments is now characterized by the struggle for and against fascist tendencies. The Bucard fascist movement has also reached Alsace and formed groups in Strasbourg, Saargemund, Walmuenster, and Bischweiler. The pro-fascists declare themselves in their press to be "authoritarian, corporatist, anti-Semitic, anti-Masonic, and anti-parliamentary." The "Jeunesses Patriotes" and the "Front Sociale" are also leaning toward fascist concessions. As evidence of the greater boldness with which influential French politicians have recently been publicly demonstrating their pro-fascist leanings, one may cite the interview granted by Minister Henry Berenger—French Ambassador and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee—to the Paris-based newspaper *Nuova Italia*. He admitted that His Excellency the Italian Head of Government, by his example, "is shaping the destiny of humanity" and that fascism "has a uniquely Italian face and a broad universal aspect."

GERMANY

The National Socialist Party seized power in the elections of March 5, 1933. The number of votes received by the individual parties illustrates the proportion of support for Hitler's doctrine relative to other political movements in Germany.

After seizing power, there was a massive wave of people joining the National Socialist Party, which rapidly established a totalitarian system, absorbed workers into corporatist-based National Socialist trade unions, and brought about the progressive political and territorial unification of the Reich. The influx of new members was so great that party membership was temporarily suspended.

In early September 1933, a large parade of National Socialist forces took place in Nuremberg. It is estimated that approximately 120,000 men from the stormtroopers and the Stahlhelm (Steel Helmets) association were gathered there, marching for five hours, along with 140,000 Amtswalter (party officials) and 70,000 youths from the Hitler Youth. Mr. Hess, a party representative, extended a cordial greeting to the Italian guests, the Honorable Bottai and Marpicati, at the opening of the congress, making reference to Italy and Fascism. Their Excellencies the Honorable Bottai and Professor Marpicati, as well as the Royal Chargé d'Affaires, were greeted with great enthusiasm by the crowd, estimated at 100,000 people. Overall, the impressive demonstration showcased the discipline of the regime's followers and the support of the majority of the population.

The National Socialist units are flanked by the Stahlhelm, organized by Minister Seldte: they number 750,000 men, including 600,000 highly trained former infantry soldiers, and numerous young men who were unable to perform military service due to the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles but who received comprehensive military training from the Stahlhelm and the Reichswehr. While the Stahlhelm initially seemed to maintain a reserved and wary attitude toward National Socialism, with the removal of Colonel Dusterberg and other leaders, and its reorganization under National Socialist leadership, it has become a staunch supporter of the regime.

National Socialism is proceeding with great alacrity to reform the laws of the state in accordance with

its theoretical principles, with full powers conferred upon the government on

March 24, 1933. The general trend of the reforms is toward unification, in contrast to the traditional particularism of the German people. With the Reich Law of April 7, 1933, enacted by the government by virtue of its full powers, a decisive step was taken toward the unification and constitutional reform of the Reich.

This law establishes the Statthalter, or Reich Lieutenants, and, pursuant to the parallel law on the equalization of the confederated states (Gleichschaltung), these states may not have elected representative bodies whose composition differs from that of the Reichstag. This dealt a decisive blow to the autonomy of the Länder, since the Statthalter appoint and dismiss the Presidents of the Council and exercise the right of pardon, as well as the power to appoint and dismiss officials. Furthermore, the remnants of the individual states' right of legation are in the process of being abolished. Building on the same unifying principle, the various Protestant churches that had existed until then were merged. Their "National Synod" convened on September 27, 1933, in Wittenberg, and must now be convened at least once a year. Among other things, its task will be to confirm the appointment of the "Reich Bishop," a newly created office. However, during 1934, serious difficulties arose in carrying out this unifying effort in the religious sphere, which cannot be discussed in detail here. Suffice it to say that the Protestant Reich Bishop is far from having achieved the goals assigned to him.

As far as the economy is concerned, National Socialism aims above all to protect the medium-sized farmer and the petty bourgeoisie, freeing them from the "tyranny of interest." Department stores, which had experienced massive growth in Germany, are therefore being targeted; consumer cooperatives (1,299 with 4,000 branches) are to become a vast cooperative organization that will sublease its retail spaces to private merchants, who will be controlled by the organization itself; in this way, the interests of both consumers and commerce are intended to be protected simultaneously.

Banks have not yet been affected, partly because, due to the crisis, a large number of them are under direct or covert government control.

However, based on an investigation led by Dr. Schacht of the Reichsbank, the banking system will have to be reorganized "to serve the public interest."

An Advertising Council under the Ministry of Propaganda monitors advertising in all its forms, cracking down on abuses. To combat unemployment, which continues to rage, a vast relief plan has been devised and is still under consideration. The 17-member Reich Economic Council, which met for the first time on September 19, 1933, to combat unemployment, includes industrialists, bankers, and presidents of chambers of commerce.

Furthermore, a compulsory labor program—currently carried out by subversive elements confined in concentration camps—will be systematically implemented for broad segments of the population.

The National Socialist program for the corporatist organization of the state calls for the abolition of hourly wages and the introduction of a minimum weekly wage.

Particular attention was given to agriculture, considered the foundation of national prosperity and ethical well-being. October 1 was designated as the "great harvest festival" in honor of farmers. Agriculture has been organized on a corporative basis; on September 20, 1933, a "fair price" for grain was established. A return to the right of primogeniture is under consideration to prevent the

fragmentation of agricultural property.

The idea of irredentism is naturally being promoted by the new German spiritual climate, especially among young people. At a grand “German Schools Festival” organized by the League for Germanism to benefit the 900 German schools abroad, which took place on September 10, 1933, at the Berlin Stadium, 30,000 schoolgirls sang irredentist hymns before a crowd of 50,000 people.

National Socialism cannot be equated with Fascism, due to differences stemming from the distinct contexts in which they emerged. The core ideas of the Social-Nationalist Party seek to follow the model of Fascism, particularly regarding its totalitarian character and the desire to remain a movement in perpetual development; its hierarchical structure and treatment of the masses; and the strong state and the principle of authority.

While an analysis of the party’s program and propaganda reveals elements in Social Nationalism analogous to Fascism, there are nevertheless essential differences stemming from the traditions and differing structures of Italy and Germany. In particular, the two parties diverge in their basic conception of the nation, which for National Socialism is identified with race,

In fact, racist theory has been established as the basis for history instruction in German schools. According to directives from the Minister of the Interior, school textbooks must distinguish between the Nordic and Salian races in Europe and demonstrate that European history is a product of the Nordic (Indo-European) peoples—just as the Indians, the Medes, and the Persians were Nordic, though later overwhelmed by other races—and the Greeks, who, as conquerors, represented the country’s ruling class.

In particular, this racist theory is directed against the Jews, who, following the rise of National Socialism to power, have been subjected to particularly harsh treatment.

On April 1, 1933 (Boycott Day), the well-known legislative campaign against the Israelites began. A great many Jews fled abroad, but the exodus was not complete and came to a standstill.

In National Socialist theory, the issue of race is linked to social prophylaxis. One of the most controversial measures in this area is the “artificial sterilization” law, which took effect on January 1, 1934. Sterilization is ordered by a “Court for Hereditary Health,” even against the individual’s will, in cases of imbecility, epilepsy, insanity, hereditary blindness or deafness, severe deformities, and alcoholism. For sexually dangerous offenders, it appears that another law will provide for “castration.”

Regarding Hitler’s personality, the book *Mein Kampf*, written in prison at the beginning of the movement he led, is instructive. A more effective orator than a profound thinker, the insistence with which he often returns to the same topics—as one of his interlocutors observes—suggests that while he lacks the makings of a “genius,” this is compensated for by his tenacity. He speaks with passion, is convincing, knows how to adopt an inspired demeanor, and knows how to break it with a witty remark that instantly brings him closer to his listeners. He is a man suited to rallying the masses and setting an example. “Racist theories” were provided to him primarily by Rosenberg, Head of the Party’s Foreign Policy Office, a typical Baltic German; economic theories were provided in part by the engineer Feder. Propaganda Minister Goebbels is an effective collaborator in spreading racism among the masses; in military matters, Göring, a valiant fighter, is certainly a good advisor. But Hitler himself has admitted and acknowledged that he studied and imitated Mussolini and Italian Fascism.

Linked to the National Socialist movement, the German youth organization—headed by Baldur von Schirach—is making progress. Nabelrsburg is primarily responsible for German youth abroad; among other things, he attempted to establish relations with the British “Scouts” by making a special trip to London last January, though he has not yet succeeded in this endeavor. In Berlin, the newly established Institute of Italian Law will centralize efforts to promote and explain Fascist culture and reforms. Other initiatives undertaken by university circles and Italian-German groups in various German cities indicate a general interest in the Italian Fascist movement.

NOTES ON THE SWASTIKA

(German: Hakenkreuz − Latin: Crux gammata − French: Croix gam-mée − Old English: Fulfot − Sanskrit: Swastika).

The symbol of racism. In Europe, it has been found in Transylvania and Bessarabia since the Stone Age, and in Asia, in China and Japan, since the third millennium B.C.

However, the swastika takes on a special meaning in India, from which the Indo-Aryan race is said to have originated, and of which the swastika is intended to be the symbol.

From the Maltese archipelago, the symbol extends as far as Polynesia; in Africa, it is known as an ornament in Sudanese leatherwork and in wooden carvings from the Congo; in the Americas, it is found in the Mississippi region among the Pueblo Indians, in Central America, and in the virgin forests of Brazil. Its distribution is universal; the swastika is unknown only among Semitic and Australian peoples.

As a magical symbol, it has numerous other meanings: in Indian Buddhism, it is considered an auspicious or inauspicious sign depending on its strength; in Mexico, it symbolizes the course of the sun. Its shape has been explained in various ways: as a linear representation of a human figure, as a depiction of Thor’s hammer (the god of war among the ancient Germanic peoples), as the image of two intersecting lightning bolts, of a stork in flight or brooding in its nest, or, finally, as a symbol of the sun. It is also believed—though this is doubtful—to be the symbol of fire among the ancient Aryans (the two pieces of wood that, when rubbed together, produce a flame are said to be represented by the two arms of the cross). An Etruscan terracotta vase discovered in Volterra and dating back seven or eight centuries bears a hooked cross on its side. It is more hooked than the one adopted as a symbol by Nazism, with each hook itself curved in a Greek key pattern. But there are other hooked and simple crosses on those Etruscan tombs. The (solar?) swastika symbol did not originate in Germanic lands. The Etruscans understood the occult power of symbols better than other peoples.

The hooked cross, understood as a symbol of the Aryan race, dates back to 1910 and to the followers of Guido List, who made it the emblem of anti-Semitic associations.

Having become the distinctive symbol of National Socialism—and particularly of its racist ideology—the swastika currently appears on the uniforms of Hitler’s party, the auxiliary police force created by

the party, military-style formations, and the new flag of the Reich.

In its current political significance within Hitlerism, the swastika is intended to symbolize the pure Indo-European Aryan race in contrast to alleged “contaminations” and, above all, the Semitic race.

A press release from Berlin dated April g warns that “the hammer and sickle” will go on sale on May 1, organized by the Third Reich’s Ministry of Propaganda, on the occasion of National Labor Day. The two symbolic tools are no longer considered seditious by the National Socialist Party. Moreover, they will frame the effigy of Goethe, beneath which the National Socialist eagle will be visible.

The *Völkischer Beobachter* writes that Germany, with the new emblem, sought to “express the unity between intellectual workers and manual laborers.”

A Reich Commissariat for “internal colonization” was established, and Gottfried Feder was appointed to head it.

JAPAN

A new party has been formed in Japan by a group of dissidents from the old Social Democratic Party (Shahai Minshuto), which has taken the name Nippon Kokka Shakaito. Its leader is Mr. Akamatsu, who aims to abolish the parliamentary system. The country is to have a single party, led by an oligarchy representing the will of the people, and by a Council composed of competent experts who will serve as the executive bodies. This oligarchy is to consist primarily of military leaders, since the armed forces will play a primary role in social organization.

The party considers Manchuria indispensable to Japanese workers and intends to establish a socialist state encompassing Japan and Manchuria.

The Emperor will be provisionally left in his position, thanks to the influence he still exerts over the country, but he will not be allowed to govern.

This new party has a large following among the working masses, especially among agricultural workers. The Akamatsu movement is the first example in Japan of laborists leaning toward fascism; other smaller nationalist and socialist groups are affiliated with it.

Several political groups also classify themselves as fascist, including the Akaos, which has a following in certain working-class circles. The Kokuhou-Sha Party (Association for the Reorganization of the People) is the strongest among those with fascist tendencies and dates back to 1932. Its leadership is entrusted to Mr. Araki, former Ambassador to Berlin, and its most prominent leaders are Mr. Honda and Baron Hiranumi, Vice President of the Council of State.

The “Nichou Nomin Kumnai” (Rural Fascist Association) published a manifesto on the occasion of the Empire’s anniversary, arguing that this patriotic celebration should not be monopolized by

reactionaries. It calls for the return of the landowners' estates to the Emperor, the suppression of the Communist Party, and the nationalization of Manchuria's revenues. There are also several secret associations that misuse the term "fascist."

GREECE

For some time now, a simmering unrest has been evident in Greece against the old parties and the old politicians, who have reduced the administration of public affairs to a futile factional struggle. The media controversy was initiated by Gen. Metaxas, who proposed the formation of a dictatorial government and sparked a broad debate in the press; although this debate petered out without result, it is a symptom of the malaise in Greek political life.

The most authoritative newspaper to have examined a solution with the greatest seriousness was *Estia*, which emphasized the need to strengthen governmental authority through an extra-parliamentary solution based on the principles of more complete state sovereignty.

In January 1934, it was announced that a movement—aimed at establishing a strong government inspired by fascist doctrine—had been formed under the leadership of the newspaper *Estia*, the organ of the Hellenic Youth, and that it included deputies, senators, professors, army officers, and retirees, with General Metaxas at its head, who was to take charge of it.

Naturally, left-wing newspapers lashed out against dictatorial systems, and most politicians in power declared themselves staunch supporters of parliamentarism. General Condilis, however, distanced himself from this stance; he is one of the few men considered a potential "dictator," having criticized the shortcomings of the parliamentary system and highlighted the successes achieved by Fascism in Italy and by governments in general—while declaring that in Greece, due to different political conditions, the establishment of a dictatorial regime would be impossible and dangerous.

Meanwhile, the press has announced the formation of a new political party, "OEKK" (Organossis Etuiki Kiriarchu Kratus, Organization of the Sovereign National State), about which very little is known at this time; it is therefore impossible to say whether it will have the means and strength to grow. In a statement issued by the organization, which called on "all Greeks to rally for the salvation of the nation and the race," ideas were expressed that were analogous to those published in *Estia*, leading the opposition press to view the OEKK as an offshoot of His Majesty's Army. The Special Militias, a quintessentially Italian fascist institution, will be emulated in Greece, with a specific bill currently under consideration. The militias currently being formed would be entrusted with the same tasks as our port and railway militias. In February 1933, Giorgio Mercuris, son of the mayor of Athens, founded the Greek National Socialist Party, which reportedly already has 8,000 members. Its secretary-general is Milziade Jossif, a scholar of Italian fascism.

Greek National Socialism, setting aside the two major parties in contention—the People's Party and the Liberal Party—would like to represent a third alternative by achieving national harmony and an authoritarian government; however, Mercuris lacks the makings of a man of action on a grand scale,

and the Greek people still love political factions too passionately.

In summary, it can be said that there are notable signs of a desire for state reorganization, but that these have not yet taken concrete form.

ENGLAND

ASSOCIATIONS, STATISTICS, PROGRAMS, AND COMMENTS

The British Fascist movement is divided into three associations: the “British Union of Fascists,” a faithful follower of Italian Fascism, led by Sir Oswald Mosley; the “Imperial Fascist League,” represented in Parliament by Mr. Doran and inspired by German National Socialism; and finally, Mr. Webster’s “British Fascist,” an amorphous association that operates more in the theoretical than the practical realm and occasionally publishes the newspaper “British Fascism,” which has anti-Semitic tendencies.

THE “BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS”

The movement’s publications are: the weekly “The Blackshirt,” which is aimed at the working classes, and the official periodical “The Fascist Week,” which is aimed at the more educated classes. This association is the most important and is constantly growing. In October 1932, Mosley had “divisions” only in London and in his electoral district of Motllerwell in Scotland; by the end of 1932, the formation of 370 divisions had been announced, and Sir Mosley, in an interview from Rome, spoke of 800 “sections.” Fascist Headquarters reported 100,000 members; some newspapers put the figure at around 230,000.

In a report from Berlin, the Observer reported on the founding of a Mosley Fasci section in the capital of the Reich on the initiative of “one of the leading English figures residing in the capital itself” and added that a thriving section already exists in Cologne.

The *Daily Mail*, in a telegram from Edinburgh, announced the formation of a Women’s Fascio in Scotland.

The *Sunday Dispatch* of July 18, 1933, stated that 70% of the English Blackshirts consisted of workers and unemployed people who were disillusioned and discontented.

The Fascist Party is headquartered in London in a majestic building on King's Road. The offices are organized into five departments: Treasury, Propaganda, Research, Local Organizations, and Defense. The party receives 3,000 letters a week and organizes 500 meetings a month throughout England, with 20 prominent official propagandists and the two aforementioned weekly newspapers: *Settimana Fascista* and *Camicia Nera*, which express support for Italian foreign policy and have recently spoken out in favor of Italy's plan for the Danube region.

Members of the "Corpo di Difesa" are not paid; on the contrary, they pay dues that are reduced, in the event of unemployment, to 1 shilling and 4 pence per month.

Traveling propagandists are paid 2 pounds a week plus a daily allowance of 7 shillings. It is estimated that the dues paid in this way amount to 70,000 pounds annually. In another interview granted to the Sunday Express, Mosley outlined the program of the British Fascists. He said: "We intend to come to power by legal, peaceful, and constitutional means. Initially, we will seek to establish Fascism in the country, and subsequently we will attempt to seize power through parliamentary elections. However, should the Communist Party or other forces attempt an armed revolution against the state, we will fight with the same weapons to destroy it. Our loyalty to the Crown is beyond question; we will abolish the current Parliament; the first act of the Fascist majority in the new Parliament will be to grant the government absolute powers of action; the House of Lords will be composed of the National Corporation of Industry."

With regard to the Jews, Mosley declared that the British Fascist movement is not anti-Semitic. Regarding the "trade unions," he stated that the class struggle must be abolished. Trade unions on the one hand and the Employers' Federation on the other will be absorbed into a form of corporatist state. "To address unemployment," Mosley concluded, "there can be no alternative to the corporatist system, which will simultaneously allow for an increase in wages and purchasing power across all industrial sectors."

When questioned by the correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, Mosley confirmed that his program is that of His Excellency Mussolini, with the necessary adaptations to the local situation and racial differences. "There cannot be different forms of Fascism," he said, "there is only one: that of the Duce." Fascism today is comparable, from a historical standpoint, to the great movements of universal faith such as conservatism, liberalism, and socialism, which have been common to all civilized peoples. Fascism is the greatest constructive and revolutionary faith the world has ever known; it is a revolutionary creed that belongs to all of humanity."

The public began to take notice of Mosley's Fascism after Lord Rothermere, at the end of 1933, lent him his support through the *Daily Mail* and the other newspapers he controlled throughout the country.

The *Daily Mail* published letters—primarily from young people and veterans—expressing enthusiastic support for the newspaper's new political stance. The labor leader Hannen Swaffer, who had warned daily in his columns in the *Daily Mail* against the fascist threat, was silenced. Mosley seizes every opportunity to emphasize that his movement is purely British and will remain so. As early as January 1933, he had studied the organizational forms and methods adopted in Italy. He also traveled to Munich to visit Hitler. In the May issue of *Blackshirt*, Mosley concludes an editorial with the following words: "Forward, toward world Fascism!"

Although he is not anti-Semitic, Mosley's late wife, the daughter of Mr. Curzon, is said to have had Jewish ancestry; Jews have attacked Sir Mosley's movement, and a Jewish movie theater banned the screening of fascist scenes and speeches, provoking strong reactions and anti-Semitic controversy. "The Blackshirt" generally does not cover Hitler and is exclusively admiring of the Duce, of whom Mosley continually professes himself a follower.

The leaders' activities are carried out daily through new demonstrations. The Fascist Parliamentary Association—formed when Sir Oswald Mosley decided to run in the upcoming general election—is organizing a school of public speaking and debate to prepare a large number of propagandists for the election campaign.

In fact, electoral groups are being formed. Significant progress has been made in Liverpool, Devonshire, Cornwall, and Scotland. At the large rally in Birmingham on January 21, 1934, the movement's commitment to constitutionalism was reaffirmed; it will participate in the upcoming elections by seeking a popular verdict. In the event of victory, electoral reform is promised that would limit the right to vote to citizens based on their economic activity. Mosley spoke in Birmingham before 8,000 people, including 2,000 Black Shirt squadristi. The rally was a resounding success, and various parts of the speech—particularly the call for the rebirth of England in the name of the King and Fascism—were met with unanimous applause. The press (The Times, the Manchester Guardian, the News Chronicle) devoted an unusually large amount of space to it, whereas until then they had either ignored British Fascism or devoted only a few lines to it. Of particular importance is an article in the *Observer*, as it is the first of its kind to appear in a conservative newspaper.

The *Daily Mail* notes that the Black Shirts movement is strictly constitutional in its methods; it is not, as some detractors claim, anti-Semitic in character, and its aim is not to destroy the British "trade unions" but to effectively integrate them into the life of the nation. For all these reasons, the Black Shirts movement deserves the support of those in Great Britain who are tired of political games and the current state of decadence.

The *Sunday Pictorial*, which is part of the *Daily Mail* group, published an article by Lord Rothermere in which he states, among other things: "The patriotism and discipline of the British Black Shirts are and must be a practical example for English youth, to whom the underhanded tactics of old politicians have thus far denied the sacrosanct right to participate in the organization and control of our country's life."

Naturally, there is no shortage of controversy with the opposition press: the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald*.

FASCIST SUCCESSES AND LIBERAL ALARMS

Mosley's successes have caused great alarm in the opposing camp, and this is the best proof of the rise of British Fascism. The newspapers report an interview given by Lloyd George in Plymouth after a long vacation spent in Portugal, during which the Fascist movement in Great Britain had grown

significantly. The veteran leader interpreted the success of the new movement as “a sign of general restlessness and discontent with the old political systems throughout the world.” He said:

“I am following the Black Shirts movement in Great Britain with great interest. Of course, it is impossible to predict how far the movement will spread, but it is certain that it is making surprising progress; perhaps the time has come for a new system of government in England.” These statements are considered of considerable importance, given the well-known political acumen of the Welsh statesman.

The formidable momentum that the Fascist movement has recently gained in Great Britain cannot be quantified with certainty, because Sir Oswald Mosley—true to his policy of not giving ammunition to his opponents—does not allow any disclosure of membership numbers; however, the signs of growing success and the vast Fascist influence throughout England, especially in the North, are evident.

Evidence of this can also be seen in the heightened concerns of his opponents, who for the first time raised the alarm in Parliament—though they received no satisfactory response from the government.

The decision by the well-known Member of Parliament Lord Lymington to resign from office and carry out his work outside Parliament—since he was unable to “reconcile party interests with those of the country”—along with the numerous speeches by politicians and members of the government raising the issue of reforms to British institutions, to be resolved through a radical strengthening of central authority; the high number of abstentions in the recent by-election in Cbridge—these are facts that attest to the gradual loss of prestige of parliamentary democracy even in its country of origin, and to the political turmoil among the younger generations in England.

The defection of Labor MP John Beckett to fascism made a strong impression; it occurred following a statement to the press that “only fascism can lead to the salvation and reconstruction of the country.” It is believed that this well-known MP, formerly an influential figure in the Labor Party, could become one of Mosley’s most effective collaborators.

The observation that the leaders of parliamentary democracy are now passionately defending democracy against the possibility of “left-wing” or “right-wing” dictatorships is symptomatic and shows how, for the first time, there is now a felt need in England to defend the institution of Parliament —which, until recently, was considered above all controversy and all party lines.

In Parliament, there have been several questions regarding the fascist movement, and the ministers responsible have responded with great reserve, assuring that no special measures need to be taken, as existing laws are more than sufficient to regulate the legitimate development of the new party and to curb any excesses. Lord Esher, a Liberal MP, countered Lord Kinnoull’s insinuations regarding alleged funding from a foreign government by pointing out that the Labour Party’s funds, too, come from obscure sources. However, the government has admitted in Parliament that the Fascist movement is gaining ground.

Toward the end of February, British government circles reacted to the successes of fascism. Simon stated that fascist activity runs counter to the principles of English political freedom and that he intends to regulate the use of the “red shirts” of the Independent Labour Party, as well as the fascist “black shirts” and the “brown shirts” of the communists.

Following several incidents in Bristol in early April during a Fascist rally, various questions raised in

the House of Commons prompted the government to announce an upcoming decision on the issue of uniform use.

A draft bill currently being prepared would restrict the use of insignia and uniforms to private gatherings and prohibit military-style demonstrations.

Mosley countered criticism in the press regarding the use of the “black shirt,” declaring that it is a symbol of the suppression of all antagonism and class struggle.

During the second “hunger march” on London, Mosley issued strict orders to the Fascists to avoid conflicts and not to wear the black shirt—except within the sections they were to guard and defend in the event of an attack.

For British Fascism, however, the phase of clashes with the authorities had begun. Eighteen Black Shirts allowed themselves to be arrested without resisting the police in Norfolk, where they were occupying the farm of a farmer who was 500 pounds in arrears on the tithe still imposed on farmers. In this way, the Fascists sought to offer a heartfelt demonstration of solidarity with the farmers, while Sir Moslev declared that if Fascism came to power, that tax would be abolished. The eighteen young men were acquitted and merely given a warning, and Fascism emerged from the incident strengthened by the publicity. Thus, at Queen’s College, Oxford, a group led by Prof. Radcliffe was formed to study Fascism.

BRITISH FASCISM IN ITALY

A group of Fascists affiliated with Mosley’s movement has formed in Italy. With the participation of numerous British citizens—including some from Como, Bordighera, and Bologna—a propaganda meeting was held on January 22, 1934, at the British Fascist Union branch located at Via S. Damiano No. 2 in Milan. Mr. John A. Belli, leader of the British Fascist movement in Italy, outlined the aims of British Fascism and the directives of its leader, Sir Mosley, so that Fascist doctrine might fully permeate public life in England, “which is already underway thanks to the fruitful agreements with other states bound by the same faith.” The appointment of Mr. William Hay as organizer of the Florence Fascio, with temporary headquarters in that city at Via Camerata No. 27, was ratified.

The meeting, attended by 250 British citizens, concluded to the strains of “Giovinezza” and the British national anthem, accompanied by thunderous cheers for Fascism, Mosley, and His Excellency the Italian Prime Minister.

In Genoa as well, as had already been done in Milan, a branch of the “British Union Fascists” was established, with its headquarters at 48 Via Assarotti. The treasurer of this branch, which has already attracted numerous members, is Mr. Osborne Raggio Brown. It is of great importance because numerous British subjects reside in the Ligurian capital, and because many British ships call at the port.

Following a meeting with the British fascist groups later established in Turin and Bordighera, a

telegram of congratulations was sent to His Excellency Mussolini.

MALTA

A Fascist faction of the Mosley movement has been formed with over 100 members. A demonstration in the city is planned for when the membership reaches 1,000. So far, aside from the badges worn by members, there have been no demonstrations. The leader of the movement is Baron Giuseppe Chapelle, a former lieutenant in the Maltese Militia and the disbanded King's Regiment. The basis of the island's Fascist program is reportedly the demand for autonomy for the British colonies. Baron Chapelle, however, belongs to the Stricklandian group, and there are fears that his actions may not be favorable to the cause of the Italians in Malta. The Nationalist Party has therefore warned its members against this new organization, which—"both because of the political leanings of its leaders and because of its ambiguous platform"—may, among other aims, seek to divide the Nationalists and stifle the issue of the Italian language.

NORTHERN IRELAND (ULSTER)

A Fascist party has emerged in Belfast, to which numerous influential figures from the province have already joined, and which is gaining many followers among the youth. It appears to be an offshoot of Mosley's English movement, with which it maintains excellent relations in any case. Like their English counterparts, these Ulster Fascists also wear black shirts.

The new party has published a manifesto in which it declares its desire for a united Ireland and denounces the "monstrosity" of the current division between Ulster and the Irish Free State. According to the Ulster fascists, a united Ireland must remain an integral part of the British Empire and not become an independent republic, as De Valera, President of the Council of the Irish Free State, would like.

Any policy that aims to make Ireland a Dominion—the manifesto states—will have our full support. The "Blue Shirts" movement in the Irish Free State is largely fascist in character. From our point of view, Ireland must remain within the Empire. The existence of a fascist movement in the Irish Free State may perhaps foreshadow the creation of the Irish Dominion.

THE “IMPERIAL FASCIST LEAGUE”

This association predates Mosley’s; it took part in the struggle against the labor movement during the general strike of 1926.

The “imperialists” wear black shirts with a white swastika as their uniform and are loyal followers of Hitler. Mr. Doran, who is supported by emissaries from the Reich, is their leader and represents them in Parliament; the Nazi press in Germany offers them praise and encouragement, while mocking Mosley’s fascism.

The “imperialists,” however, lack what the two similar movements do have, namely a true leader. Nevertheless, even the rank-and-file “imperialists” are numerous and have purchased their own headquarters, which was inaugurated on May 1, 1933. They also publish a monthly newspaper titled *The Fascist*.

The “Imperialists” are ardent anti-Semites and, consequently, enemies of the British Union. In its April 1933 issue, “The Fascist” reported that His Excellency the Head of Government had granted an audience to Mr. Sokolov, president of the World Zionist Organization.

BRITISH FASCISTS

This movement was founded in 1923 by Miss Linton-Ornan with the support of retired General Blackeney, but is now of secondary importance.

It is led by Mr. Webster. In July 1933, the “British Fascists” held a meeting at which several of their leaders spoke. From these speeches, it appeared that the “British Fascists” have an almost entirely negative platform, limited to the patriotic struggle against Jews, Communists, and Socialists, but lacking constructive ideas in the economic sphere. When asked about this, Webster stated that the movement has approximately 400,000 members, though this figure is highly questionable. The vast majority are sympathizers; the active, committed members who can be counted on for demonstrations and the struggle against the Communists are certainly far fewer in number. The movement’s resources are also very limited: few people contribute, and even those who do contribute only modestly.

JANUARY CLUB

This Club, founded in January 1934, has declared that it does not wish to be a fascist organization in the strict sense, but that it favors the advent of Fascism in England. The President, Sir John Squire, a well-regarded English critic and writer, commented on the political and intellectual activities of the new Club in this vein during the inaugural session, asserting that several members are of fascist persuasion.

CORPORATISM IN GREAT BRITAIN

The Italian corporatist doctrine has found an unexpected application in the British colonies. In a public lecture on November 24, 1933, Professor Grigg of the University of Nottingham argued that the colonies are governed by local dictatorships under the orders of a distant and incompetent democracy, and that in the colonial territories the class struggle becomes a racial struggle. Kenya, for example, does not need political parties, but rather the counsel of all the various spheres of activity within the colony.

Sir Edward Grigg also observed “how the unsatisfactory situation produced by the current system is particularly evident in Kenya, where it is, on the contrary, absolutely essential to have a strong executive power that, while dependent on London, has the authority and competence to address all local issues, and whose primary function is to maintain a balance between the races and political parties without fear or favoritism.”

In this regard, he states that “some of the reforms that the Duce has implemented and continues to implement in Italy impress and appeal to him.” The Duce pursues two objectives that Grigg considers fundamental, even when applied in the colonial sphere. First, he harmonizes a strong central executive power—which is neither created by nor accountable to a legislature—with a representative system in which every form of national opinion has the power to shape the country’s policy within certain “functional” limits. This is achieved through the corporations, each of which undoubtedly exerts a decisive influence within its particular sphere of activity. Professional politicians are the worst enemies of an efficient colonial government, and even in Kenya we must follow the Duce’s example by adopting a system that excludes them.

There is also a second objective in Mussolini’s policy, consisting in the suppression of class struggle through corporatism. “Under the system currently practiced in Kenya, class struggle becomes a racial struggle, between whites, Africans, and Indians. The system of territorial representation clearly tends to accentuate racial antagonisms, and when the current Legislative Council—which is entrusted with addressing all issues—is placed at the apex of this system, it is inevitable that a struggle will emerge within it among the various 800 races, all eager to be more effectively represented in order to increase their political clout. Why, then, not create a new harmony and a new efficiency through the adoption of a corporatist system that would unite the races in the pursuit of their many common interests, rather than divide them as the current system does?”

In the fall of 1933, a group of young members of parliament and lawyers asked the government for authorization to form the new “National Defense Party,” which was to have an organization similar to

that of the German National Socialists. A delegation from the group was received by the Minister of the Interior, who told them that the Iraqi government had no objections to the creation of such a party.

IRELAND

The “Blue Shirts” Association, organized by General O’Duffy to oppose the “Irish Republican Army” movement, has been established in Ireland.

The Blue Shirts’ program of action is not yet entirely clear; however, the *Times* of August 10, 1933, reported that the Blue Shirts’ program exhibits extreme fascist tendencies. At first, General O’Duffy had declared that his movement had no political aims, but events have proven him wrong. According to some, this so-called Irish neo-fascism is exclusively anti-republican and anti-democratic in nature; this explains the strong opposition to De Valera’s government.

In an interview with the press, General O’Duffy confirmed that he had no dictatorial ambitions and outlined his plan to reform the parliamentary system, which would put an end to party politics. Each “parish” would constitute a unit headed by a committee representing various interest groups; the parishes would then be grouped together, corresponding to the current electoral districts; from these groups, central delegates and parliamentary representatives would be chosen. Bills could only be introduced by the groups representing the relevant interest groups.

General O’Duffy is also a supporter of the unification of Northern and Southern Ireland.

O’Duffy’s Fascism is, at its core, nothing more than a mask and a new guise for the opposition. The political struggle now revolves more around personalities than around platforms and parties, and has taken on the character of a struggle between rivals.

In December 1933, General O’Duffy was arrested and later released pending trial, as was Cronin, the Secretary of the Blue Shirts, who was convicted and is serving his sentence at Harbour Hill Prison in Dublin. He has filed an appeal against the military authorities because his blue shirt was forcibly torn off while he was awaiting trial.

The “United Ireland” Party Congress convened on February 8, 1934, with 1,600 delegates in blue shirts in attendance under the chairmanship of General O’Duffy, and identified the Italian corporatist system as the best solution to the Free State’s critical economic situation. The Congress condemned the parliamentary system and proposed, as a first step toward an Economic Parliament, an Executive Advisory Committee bringing together delegates from the Free State and Northern Ireland.

Shortly after the Congress, President De Valera introduced a bill in the House of Representatives prohibiting members of political parties from wearing their own uniforms—a provision clearly aimed at the Blue Shirts. Cosgrave’s vigorous opposition did not prevent the bill from passing on first reading by a majority vote (65 to 40), but the Senate rejected it, thereby postponing the law for 13 months, unless new elections are held in the meantime.

In the meantime, it is worth noting the parallels between the key elements of De Valera's program and Fascism, namely:

1) The Catholic element, which is identified with the entire Irish nation, constitutes the indispensable prerequisite in the programmatic statement of any party in power.

2) The socialist tendency, based on Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, which developed by drawing direct inspiration from Fascist legislation. 3) The nationalist element, which is linked to the Sinn Féin tradition.

On the other hand, Mr. De Valera is increasingly revealing himself to be a parliamentary dictator, and some see in him—rather than in General O'Duffy—the embodiment of the spirit and substance of fascism, albeit in a different form. Iceland

The nationalist revival in Iceland, led by Mr. Gisli Sigurbjorusson, head of the so-called Icelandic fascist movement, is gaining ground. Membership numbers in various provincial centers are reportedly significant, with the working class accounting for 30% of participants. The party leadership aims to assume full power but does not rule out collaborating in the meantime with the conservatives and liberals.

Mr. Sigurbjorusson, who studied in Germany—where he likely drew inspiration for the idea of founding a National Socialist or Fascist party in his homeland—has expressed his intention to travel to Italy to study the economic and corporatist reforms implemented by Fascism.

LATVIA

The "Perkonkrusts," a far-right association with fascist tendencies, held their first public demonstration on September 17, 1933. Mr. Celmnis, the association's leader, spoke, outlining the "Perkonkrusts'" program, which calls for the interests of the state to take precedence over political parties, which they do not recognize. The movement supports private property and private enterprise but believes that control of the economy must remain in the hands of the state; it advocates internal colonization, arguing that only agriculture can free the country from the economic crisis; finally, it opposes parliamentarism and calls for a President of the Republic who is independent of Parliament and whose term of office is five years instead of three. It distinguishes between two categories of minorities: the first includes Lithuanians and Estonians, whom it recognizes as equals; the second includes Jews, Germans, Russians, and Poles, with whom the Latvians do not wish to cooperate.

The "Perkonkrusts" have proven to be well-organized and making great strides.

The movement is gaining ground in the country. In fact, although Parliament was convened in an extraordinary session at the initiative of the Social Democrats to compel the government to take measures against the fascist movement, the bill proposed by the Social Democrats aimed at dissolving

Latvian fascist organizations was rejected.

However, the government resorted to another measure to deal a decisive blow to the fascist movement. In February 1934, the Riga Court issued a ruling dissolving the “Perkonkrusts” and the sports and education society “Tevjas Surgs,” which could be considered a reserve force for the former.

The ruling, which had been appealed to the Senate—acting as the High Court of Justice—took effect in March. The dissolved organizations reorganized under different names. However, a motion by the Saeima, approved by a vote of 53 to 3, requires the government to dismiss all public officials who are members of Perkonkrusts, Tevjas Surgs, Jaunas, Latvias, or Legions—all associations considered fascist. It appears that the relevant measures will be implemented with discretion.

LITHUANIA

In Lithuania, Fascism is widely known—one might say, without exaggeration—but this knowledge stems from individual initiative, as there are no institutions tasked with disseminating its principles. Nevertheless, through the work of scholars of social and political sciences, Mussolini’s ideology has penetrated deeply into Lithuanian political life: this is reflected in the Nationalist Party, the current government, the party’s internal organization, the relationship between the government and the constitution, and the centralization of state powers.

It should also be noted that, unlike the other Baltic states, which are influenced by German National Socialism, in Lithuania the methods and practices are derived from Italy, albeit with specific adaptations to local conditions. There is a group of scholars who, through lectures and publications, bring Fascist theories to the masses; notable among them are Prof. Tomosciaitis of the University of Kaunas, Major Tomkus, who specializes in Fascist studies, Dr. Kavolis, State Prosecutor, Mr. Navakas, Governor of Memel, and other prominent figures. The Institute of Political and Social Studies was then established in Kaunas; its publications and lectures focus primarily on Fascist theories and systems, especially the corporatist system.

The leaders of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party are striving to improve the party’s organization by modeling it on the fascist structure.

The President of the Republic, Smetona, is the leader of the Nationalist Party; another prominent figure in the party is Minister Tubelis, who, in a report read at a meeting of the Kaunas Nationalist Section, outlined the new program for the reorganization of the Nationalist Union and other nationalist organizations. He said: “Until now, there have been various organizations, each working on its own; these must now be united to ensure the most fruitful creative activity. The leadership of the organizations will also be reorganized: the elective principle will be abolished, given its many flaws and limited usefulness. To ensure unity of direction and to transform the Party into a force akin to an army, all leaders will be appointed from above. The Leader of the Nation, through subordinate leaders appointed by him, will lead Lithuania toward unity and independence.”

In October 1933, the Institute of Social and Political Sciences was founded, with the primary aim of "spreading Fascist culture and ideals." It comprises thirty members, among the most prominent figures in Latvian high culture. Lectures were given by Tomens, Prof. Jondeika ("Fascism in Lithuania"), and other leading intellectuals.

The Lithuanian government dissolved the German parties led by Heumann and Sass.

NORWAY

The "St. Olaf's Cross" is the Norwegian national emblem adopted by various recent movements with fascist and National Socialist tendencies. In the spring of 1934, the first reports emerged about the Norwegian National Socialist Party (Norske Nasjonal Socialistike Arbeiderparti), founded on the Hitlerian model. Even more recent is the "Foedrelandslaget" or Fatherland League, described by some newspapers as "moderately patriotic and fascist."

But the most important movement is the "Nasjonal Samling" or "National Union," led by M. Quisling, a former Minister of War in a Radical cabinet and a former collaborator of Nansen on the Relief Committee for the Starving in the Soviet Union. According to a statement reported by the Petit Parisien of Paris (February 6, 1934), Quisling believes that "society should be cooperative in the spirit of complete equality among all classes."

Norwegian fascism, as embodied by St. Olaf, is rooted in this sense of national solidarity (Nasjonal solidaritetsfølelse), which recognizes private initiative and freedom of conscience as the cornerstones of national life to be defended against the state. The state must be the conscience of society. According to Quisling, Norwegian fascism is closer to Hitler than to Mussolini. He does not deny the spiritual kinship between Norway and Germany, and asserts that Roman civilization, too, owes something to Nordic thought.

Quisling's fascist party was founded in July 1933; it received 28,000 votes in the October elections of that year, but failed to win any seats in the Storting.

NETHERLANDS

Fascist activity in the Netherlands was hampered and at times compromised by divisions that arose within the various groups, which often became bogged down in minute ideological distinctions.

The most important group was undoubtedly the "Dutch General Fascist League," led by Jean A. Baars

and founded in 1926, which outlined its program as follows in an interview: “Our goals, as set forth by Mussolini, are a corporatist state, the strengthening of the family structure, the abolition of parliamentarism and secret societies, the fight against feminism, and the restoration of women’s role within the family.” Baars was keen to emphasize the spiritual affinity with Italian Fascism and to highlight the increasingly marked difference between the National Socialist movement and program and the Fascist one. For example, he rejected anti-Semitism, thereby dissenting from Hitlerism. He acted in the interest of the people.

Other groups include the “National Unie” and the “Association of Young Fascists.” Fascist tendencies are developing most strongly among the educated classes.

Recognizing the need to forge effective ties among the various movements, to establish a common understanding, and to find a basis for concerted action in an area of shared interest, Mr. Baars, Mr. Gerretson, and other influential members of the Catholic Party examined their respective platforms. Having recognized that their goals were identical, they reached an agreement among the “Dutch General Fascist League” (Baars), the “National Union,” and the “Association of Young Fascists.”

The three groups, while retaining their distinct characteristics, are committed to joint action aimed at establishing the cornerstones of Fascist doctrine in the country.

The corporatist organization has served as the basis for this agreement, and the three groups, in the activities they intend to carry out, will present themselves as “Centers for Corporatist Coordination.” On this basis, it will be much easier for Dutch fascists to gain the support of those—and they are very numerous—who consider the fascist program to be the only one capable of confidently addressing and overcoming the difficulties that currently plague the lives of all nations.

On September 19, 1933, the “Corporative Concentration” held its first public meeting in the Dierentuin hall, packed with more than 3,000 people. Speakers included Dr. Gerretson, President of the “National Unie”; Mr. Jos Mineur, a Catholic and president of the “Dutch Young Fascists”; and Mr. Baars. Dr. Gerretson cited among his party’s goals the fight against unemployment using fascist methods, putting an end to the shameful handout of subsidies to the unemployed; he concluded by saying that Dutch fascism would reflect the character of its people; it would therefore not be a copy of Italian Fascism or German National Socialism.

Due to the ban on wearing political party uniforms, which took effect on September 18, 1933, the “Corporate Concentration” adopted the ancient Batavian symbol of the sacred fire striker—the “Vuurslag”—as its emblem.

Fascist movements are developing among Dutch Catholics despite opposition from the higher clergy. Thousands of copies of proclamations have been distributed, and a plan is underway to create “Groups of Friends of the Fascists.”

While the older movement, founded about eight years ago, is not making much progress (the group led by Baars, whose private life has given rise to serious accusations, has 4,000 members and does not seem likely to grow), the number of members in the Mussert National Socialist Group, on the other hand, is rising daily and has already reached 25,000—a development that worries Catholics and Socialists, who asked the government to prohibit state officials from joining such fascist movements, and after some resistance, they succeeded in having the group included on the list of “banned parties,” which ranges from anarchist groups to Baars’s fascist movement. Approximately 3,000 civil servants

are therefore expected to leave the Mussert Group, including Mussert himself, who is an engineer assigned to the Ministry of Public Works.

Mussert's party is "National Socialist" in name only: it adopted that designation solely to distinguish itself from other groups—those of Haighton and Baars—which had emerged before his. Mussert has always asserted—and continues to assert in his speeches and in the press—that he called his party "National Socialist" solely because it has two specific aims: the national and the social; however, it derives in no way from Hitler's ideology, but rather from Mussolini's Fascism. About three years ago, in fact, during a trip to Italy, he became convinced that the Netherlands should follow the Italian example, and upon his return, he formed the first core group.

Today, Mussert bases his actions on the following:

1) A relentless struggle against the red parties, in the belief that communism and socialism can be definitively eradicated only when the majority of nations have embraced Fascism.

2) Strengthening in the Netherlands: the national spirit and the drive for national expansion, which have been numbed by socialism.

3) A struggle against Dutch individualism and the creation of a true and effective national unity independent of religions, all of which will be equally respected.

4) Adoption and, as soon as possible, implementation of the Italian Corporative State.

5) No racial policy. On this issue, adoption of Mussolini's principles.

6) A boldly nationalist foreign policy. Defense at all costs of the moral and material independence of the Netherlands and its colonies.

Mussert is a man in his forties, short in stature, stocky, and ruddy-cheeked; typically Dutch. He is inexperienced in political struggles and intrigues. He wins followers through his honesty and his absolute faith, rather than through propaganda tactics. His oratory is not brilliant, but clear and incisive. He has given his followers the ancient motto of the Dutch galleons: "Hou zee"! To us, the sea! He holds Mussolini in high regard. His actions are inspired by Rome; nevertheless, his study of certain German achievements has been useful to him due to the affinity between Germans and Dutch. He has certainly exchanged ideas with prominent figures of the Reich. In response to the misunderstandings arising for many from the party's name, "National Socialist," he states that he is aware of them, but that it is now common knowledge that his group is Dutch nationalist, fascist, and not Hitlerite.

None of this prevents accusations that he is directed—and perhaps even subsidized—by Berlin; accusations which, even if refuted, can cast a shadow over his program of absolute independence and uncompromising nationalism. His relations with the Hitlerite party are good, but they only became so after Berlin fully realized that Mussert intends to act on his own and does not tolerate suggestions or influence.

What is most striking about Mussert is his conviction and, at the same time, the fact that he has so far been the only one to address the issue of unity of spirit in the face of the nation's greatness and progress. No one—neither Baars nor Gerretson—had dared, until now, to frame fascism as a matter of unity. Today, Mussert's main concern is the possibility that the clergy might forbid Catholics from

joining the Fascist movement. Mussert is not worried about the thousands of members he might lose, but because this would seriously undermine his dream of unity, leading to the formation of a Protestant Fascist group and a Catholic Fascist group. In other words, a return to divisions and subdivisions, which Mussert rightly considers the greatest danger to the Netherlands at this difficult juncture. By any means necessary, Mussert would like to avoid measures that would alienate Catholics from him. He would like to take action in Rome, through one of his influential associates—a relative of the Superior General of the Jesuits—to make it clear how much respect he has for the Catholic religion (he is the son of a Catholic mother), how Catholicism will draw new strength from the triumph of Fascism in the Netherlands, and how baseless and false are the accusations by some enemies that he maintains ties with Freemasonry.

Of particular interest, given its boldness, is the foreign policy program that Mussert cherishes privately but about which he speaks with the utmost caution. He expresses regret that the government's current foreign policy is once again orienting itself toward France. For him, France is the Netherlands' only true enemy, against which one must fight tirelessly. "Today," he says, "France, by dominating Belgium, is the true enemy at our borders. My party will never forget the tactics France employed during the peace negotiations to have a part of our Limburg assigned to Belgium."

Mussert would like the Netherlands to be morally and militarily prepared for any eventuality, capable of taking advantage of any opportunity. His ultimate program, which ties in with the pan-Dutch ideal, envisions the future return of the Flemish provinces to the Netherlands and the cession of the Walloon provinces to France. The Congo, given the enormous French colonial empire, will have to pass to the Netherlands along with the Flemish provinces. Regarding the exploitation of the Congo, Engineer Mussert has alluded to a policy of close Italian-Dutch collaboration.

Mussert's movement appears to have real significance. This is demonstrated, if nothing else, by the fear with which the weary traditional Dutch parties view it, the disorderly and continuous attacks directed against it, and also the attitude of those French and pro-French elements who seek to undermine its effectiveness by spreading, in bad faith, the rumor that Mussert is a puppet of Hitler, and that therefore, rather than galvanizing the country's independence, he seeks to subjugate it to Germany.

DUTCH EAST INDIES

In Batavia, a group of fascist sympathizers and admirers of the Italian regime has formed. They aim to secure Java's freedom under a constitutional monarchy and to create a League of Independent Monarchists of the Indian Archipelago.

For reasons not yet fully ascertained—among which private matters cannot be ruled out—and due to pressure from the majority, the President of the General League of Dutch Fascists, Baars, was forced to resign in early April 1934; he was replaced by M. R. Brinkgreve, a move believed to further weaken the organization, which was already threatened by internal divisions.

PANAMA

In 1931, the “Reserva Nacionalista” was founded, an association of young Panamanians with a patriotic-nationalist character, which, however, ceased to exist in early 1932. During the association’s activities, Mr. Tapia Collante, who was one of its leaders, continued to study the Fascist movement, seeking to steer the association in that direction.

After the “Reserva Nacionalista” was dissolved in July 1932, a group of about 100 Panamanians founded “La Unión de Defensa Nacional,” a fascist-oriented association working intensively to establish a full-fledged party.

Currently, Mr. Tapia Collante is the “leader” of the Union de Defensa Nacional and also edits “Siglo xx°,” a small-circulation newspaper serving as the association’s propaganda organ.

The new party makes use of its best members for propaganda purposes; as government employees, they have access to the working-class and agricultural populations. The party has begun publishing two newspapers: the “TRIBUNA” in Panama City and “ESCIPION” in Colón.

Mr. Gonzalo Tapia Collante is the son of the Minister of Agriculture and Public Works and studied in Rome when his father was Secretary of the Panamanian Legation to the Quirinal.

PERU

In February 1934, President Dr. de la Riva Aguiero, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Italian Book Fair, delivered a speech extolling Fascism and the work of His Excellency the Head of Government, calling for the awakening of Latin Americans from their “shameful slumber.” This statement provoked vigorous protests from the National Alliance, composed of the social democratic parties and the independent group in Congress.

A movement has been formed under the name “Fascist Party—Sixth International of the Union of the Right,” led by Temistocle Vallejo, Secretary-General, who also heads the “Peruvian Cell of Lima.” The level of organization among its members is low, and for now the movement does not appear to be a serious one. It aims to expand throughout Latin America, convene an international congress of the Fascist Right in Lima, and combat the “open-door” left.

POLAND

In Katowice, the “Radical Renewal Movement” has gathered 5,000 members wearing light blue shirts with armbands embroidered with the sword of King Bolesław the Brave, surmounted by the letters R. R. U. (Radykaburg Ruch Uzdrowienia). The leader is Giuseppe Koval, known as Lipinski because he was born in Lipina.

The movement’s official organ is the newspaper *The Front of Awakened Poland*, which extols Pilsudski and Paderewski. The movement admires fascism, is anti-Semitic without being racist, and opposes big industry.

A communiqué from Warsaw dated April 19 (Tribuna, April 20, 1934) announced that the first Polish fascist party had been founded by a group of young people who had split from the National Democratic Party to form a group called Cam, or Radical-Nationalist. The new organization calls for more decisive political action.

PORTUGAL

In Portugal, a political association known as the “Blue Shirts,” inspired by fascist doctrine, has emerged. They recently held a rally in Porto. Following the outbreak of unrest, Manuel Silva, leader of the Blue Shirts, was arrested in August 1933. But fascist ideas are gaining ground in the Republic.

On January 17, 1934, Prime Minister Salazar delivered a speech in which he stated that the Portuguese state must be reorganized, through constitutional means, as a Corporate Republic, taking into account the material, intellectual, and moral interests of the nation. “Instead of being guided by rulers, the nation’s economic life will be guided by corporative organizations that will do away with plutocracy. Money will be the servant of labor, not the other way around.”

In February 1934, the new Portuguese Student Association (Associação Escolar Vanguardia)—which, modeled after the G.U.F., aims to carry out its activities among the student body, resolutely waging the battle against communism and Freemasonry—was solemnly inaugurated at the San Carlo Theater in Lisbon. The ceremony took on great significance due to the presence of the Head of Government, Dr. De Oliveira Salazar, other members of the government, and representatives from the universities of Lisbon, Coimbra, and Porto, to whom the new pennant was solemnly presented.

Also in attendance, by special invitation, were the Italian and German ambassadors and a delegation from the Italian Fascio in Lisbon, who were asked to attend wearing black shirts.

The event took place in an atmosphere of warm enthusiasm, amid vibrant cheers that underscored the most notable passages of the speeches by the President of the new Association and the Head of

Government. The Portuguese youth repeatedly hailed the Duce and the new Italy.

Enthusiastic cheers of “Evviva!” rang out from the crowd in support of Italy when the Secretary of National Propaganda spoke of the work of the “Great Mussolini,” while Prime Minister Salazar signaled for applause. Hitler’s name was passed over in silence.

The organ of the youth movement and the newspaper *Avante*, which conducts passionate anti-Masonic campaigns.

ROMANIA

The “Iron Guard” movement was founded on June 24, 1927, with the Legion named after the Archangel Michael. On August 1, 1927, “La terra degli Avi” was published; in 1929, the first political meeting was held, and on June 1, 1931, the movement participated in elections in 17 districts without success. In 1932, the Legionnaires won 70,000 votes and 4 seats in the general election and controlled 17 newspapers.

The “Guardia di Ferro” is an organization based on fascist-style discipline; “guided by pure nationalism, it seeks to awaken the nation’s energies, defend the altars of the church, shield the throne, and rebuild the nation.” It operates through “nests” in villages under the control of a legion leader.

Legionary members of parliament contribute two-thirds of their salary to the party. They are at the leader’s complete disposal and, if necessary, must sleep in the Legion’s barracks, where free beds and semi-free meals are provided for true members.

In November 1933, the Honorable Eugenio Coselschi, as President of the Action Committees for the University of Rome, traveled to Bucharest, where he gave lectures on Fascist culture and made contact with the “Iron Guard” organization. Upon his departure, the “green shirts” presented the Honorable Coselschi with 156 signed messages containing expressions of homage to His Excellency the Head of Government, admiration for Fascism and for Italy, affirmations of shared views in the struggle against communism and social democracy, and exhortations not to cultivate friendship with Hungary, to fight the Jews, and not to induce Romania to cede even an inch of its legitimate territory.

A strong faction within the “Iron Guard” harbors feelings of hatred toward Yugoslavia’s “imperialism and Pan-Slavism.”

It is worth noting some contact between the Fascism of the “Iron Guard” and “Cusism,” an anti-Semitic movement led by Cusa, a descendant of Prince Alexander, who in 1859 was elected Prince of Wallachia and Moldavia.

Cusa is now 75 years old, and his followers—who are solely devoted to anti-Semitic propaganda—are aligning themselves with Hitler and are said to have received subsidies from Germany. They wear the “blue shirt” bearing the swastika and use other Hitlerian emblems.

Some Hitlerian and anti-Semitic propaganda seeps through the “Cusists” into the ranks of the “Iron Guard,” but the general opinion is that the Cusist movement will soon die out and that its best elements will be absorbed and integrated into the “Green Shirts,” who possess a mystical and idealistic squadrist sensibility.

The “Iron Guard” opposes all political corruption and all democratic degeneration. It has 100,000 members, including 10,000 squad members “ready for anything,” who take a three-part oath after undergoing rigorous trials. The third oath binds them definitively to the will of the Leader and is taken while kneeling over a bag containing soil taken from the sacred tombs of Romania’s great heroes. The patron saint of the “Iron Guard” Legion is the Archangel Michael, whose image stands prominently in the Green Shirts’ headquarters alongside a portrait of Mussolini.

Leader Codreanu was acquitted of the charge of killing a police officer who had insulted him. This episode suggests that the judiciary harbors strong sympathies for the movement.

In the instructions to the legionnaires of the “Iron Guard,” the Romanian Jewish question is defined in the following terms: “The Jewish problem, visible only in the northern half of the state, invisible but also existing in the other half, constitutes for the Romanian nation the greatest danger it has faced from the beginning of history to the present day. The legionnaire is the only one capable of resolving this problem, which he faces with courage and seriousness, and which he will one day resolve along with the solution to other problems of the state that are equally urgent today.”

Immediately after the formation of the Duca Cabinet (November 14, 1933), the government decreed the dissolution of the organization. The measure, taken on the eve of the elections, dealt a severe blow to the movement, forcing it to withdraw its candidates, even as it had hoped to increase its seats from four to at least twelve. The measure appears to have been orchestrated by Titulescu, but responsibility was attributed to Duca, against whom the members’ hatred was directed. On December 29, 1933, at the Sinaja train station, President Duca fell victim to an assassination attempt carried out by a young student, a member of a disbanded anti-Semitic organization. The crackdown that followed the assassination—attributed to the “Iron Guard,” many of whose leaders were arrested—forced Codreanu to flee; for three full months, he skillfully managed to evade arrest. In the end, however, he performed the noble act of voluntarily presenting himself with his lawyer and surrendering.

There were 52 defendants, divided into four groups according to the severity of the charges, and the trial before the Military Court was of great political significance. Three defendants—namely, the perpetrator of the attack and two student accomplices—were sentenced to life imprisonment; the others, including Codreanu, were acquitted. The acquittal was interpreted as an undeniable setback for the Liberal government, which was deeply shaken by it. The dissolution of the “Iron Guard” was condemned by numerous authoritative witnesses at the trial as an arbitrary and illegal act suggested or imposed by foreign influences. The Military Tribunal’s composed demeanor—which remained unaffected by government pressure—was noted throughout the country, and right-wing factions sympathetic to Fascism appear to have been strengthened.

Among the defendants belonging to the “Iron Guard,” General Cantacuzeno was acquitted. As soon as the trial ended and he regained his freedom, the former leader of the “Iron Guard” challenged three members of an elegant Bucharest club who had proposed his expulsion “for unworthiness.” Despite his advanced age, the general fought with one of them and wounded him with a saber blow. Following these events, new commentary suggests growing and more widespread sympathy for the “Iron Guard.”

There is also a rumor circulating that the King is protecting the movement in order to rid himself of the Liberal Party, which remains in power but is doomed to disappear.

SYRIA

Fascist systems have spread throughout this part of the Arab East. The “League of National Action” has appointed a committee of distinguished men tasked with studying the fascist system and founding an Arab fascist party that will adopt the “Green” shirt as its emblem. It is very likely that the “Boy Scouts” of Syria will be incorporated into this fascist party.

The League of National Action has sent some of its members to neighboring Arab countries to encourage Arab youth from Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine to attend the congress, which is scheduled to take place at a location yet to be determined, to address specifically the current political situation in Syria and to draw up a program for the unity of the Arab countries against colonization by the imperialist powers.

The authorities are strongly obstructing the convening of this congress. The Jaffa-based *Falastin* (an independent Arab nationalist daily) of August 25, 1933, under the headline “Arab Fascism and Western Fascism,” describes the origins and root causes of fascism in Europe and asserts that the main aim of the fascist regime is to put an end to social struggles and revolutions. But while in Europe the fascist regime was created to suppress violence, in the East, on the other hand, the proponents of the fascist idea aim to rouse the leaders of the Arab nationalist movement from their lethargy and to undertake active political action.

The January 28, 1933, issue of *Giamia Al Islamia* from Jaffa (the official publication of the Executive Committee of the Pan-Islamic Congress) states that most European countries are beginning to abandon the democratic system and are drawn to the fascist ideology. The newspaper recommends that the peoples of the East use fascist doctrine solely to achieve their independence, to glorify the past, and to foster future mutual cooperation.

SPAIN

The country has been steered toward Fascism by the statements of the former President of the Cortes, the reformist socialist Besteiro, intended to advocate a profound transformation of the country by giving socialism—through the creation of a new corporative body—a constructive meaning and substance. This body would have initiative and advisory functions, and subsequently legislative functions through a constitutional reform.

Besteiro says that this “would be a true revolution.” The movement has taken the name “Falange Espanola,” which has intensified the Fascist campaign in the newspaper F. E.

Articles such as “Death Is an Act of Service” (p. 10 of the February 5, 193 issue) and “The Innocent Martyrs” (p. 12 of the same issue) indicate how the spirit of action is gaining ground. Primo de Rivera, son of the late dictator, has become the spokesperson for these new currents in Parliament, at public rallies, and in the press.

Spanish fascism has gained followers especially among young university students.

Among writers, Giménez Caballero has devoted himself to the study and propagation of fascist doctrines. He coined the striking phrase: “Mussolini has already attained the highest achievement possible in politics throughout history: the patriarchal role of the father.”

In Barcelona, in January 1934, the “Falange Española” intensified its propaganda efforts among Army officers and agents of the “Cuerpo de Seguridad” and “Guardie de Asalto,” distributing secretly printed posters that called on both workers—urging them not to hinder the advent of the Fascist State, which would offer them well-paid work and social improvements—and the authorities—urging them to assist in the establishment of the new order.

In the early months of 1934, there were several street clashes between fascists and anti-fascists, resulting in various injuries, as well as the murder of a young fascist newspaper vendor for the “Falange Espaniola.”

In February 1934, the merger—which had been under consideration for some time—of the “Falange Española” with the “National-Syndicalist Offensive Junta (J.O.N.S.)” took place, forming a new party under the name “Spanish Falange of the JONS.” The program, published in the press, can be summarized as follows: defense of national unity, anti-Marxism, anti-parliamentarism, and economic revolution in favor of farmers, workers, and small producers.

The merger of these two fascist-leaning groups, led respectively by José Antonio Primo de Rivera and the young Professor Ledesma Ramos, appears to have been driven not only by shared ideals but also by economic necessity stemming from the limited financial resources available to these associations for their propaganda efforts.

The Spanish fascist movement has had immediate repercussions among the communities in the Tangier area and in the working-class neighborhoods of northern Morocco, where, under the name “Falange Española,” the first cells of the Fasci di Combattimento are organizing, more or less clandestinely. The Tangier Fascio, which has about 300 members drawn from the best elements of the community, has issued a pamphlet setting forth the movement’s charter and objectives, which aim at “the abolition of all forms of parliamentarianism, the creation of an authoritarian government, the abolition of class struggle, and the creation of a unitary state, eliminating all forms of regionalism.”

Spanish Nazi factions, on the other hand, are turning to non-liberal Catholics, and their mouthpiece is the Madrid-based “El Debate,” which is influenced by German elements.

In early April, as he was leaving the Madrid courthouse where he had gone to testify in a fascist case, De Rivera was injured by two firecrackers thrown at his car. The attackers, confronted by fascists who

had rushed to the scene, fled.

UNITED STATES

The Silver Shirts movement is based on principles inspired by fascism. Its leader is William Dudley Pelley, an American of Irish descent who declares himself “opposed to the corruption of Bolshevism and liberalism.” The movement asserts the need for radical changes in the political and economic system to be implemented through legislative means. Industry, agriculture, and commerce should be controlled by the state; private property should be respected but coordinated with national interests; and the press should be placed at the service of the community. War must be declared on international capitalism.

By early 1934, the movement was in decline, and by February it could be said to have faded away. It was discredited by its leaders, who were suspected of seeking to exploit it by selling fabric for the production of the distinctive silver shirts.

In February 1934, a youth movement with a program very similar to that of the Fascists was formed in the Philippines, led by Manuel Roxas, and it adopted the Roman salute.

In early 1934, in the eastern and southern states—especially along the Pacific coast—groups of men and women aged 20 to 40 were formed within the Democratic and Republican parties under the name “Young Guards,” groups of men and women aged 20 to 40 were formed within the Democratic and Republican parties, with the aim of “placing the public good above all party considerations.” In the central and northwestern states, the idea is gaining ground.

A road patrol, with duties similar to those of the Fascist militia, was created by certain private organizations.

SOUTH AFRICA

According to the *Morning Post*, the Fascist movement in South Africa is gaining ground, especially among the Boer population. The strength of the Fascist movement in the Cape Colony is reportedly much greater than is generally believed.

For some time now, a port and railway militia has existed under the name “National Guard.”

On the initiative of Mr. Gunar Dahlin, former editor of the newspaper *Fader-neslandet*, a National

Socialist party was formed in Stockholm on June 13, 1933. A faction of this new political group has already split off to form a dissident wing, led by a certain Mr. Lindholm. The movement is still of secondary importance and has recently lost the popularity it enjoyed initially.

Its program, inspired by Fascism, focuses on road construction and public works to provide jobs for the unemployed and combat the crisis.

Meanwhile, in February 1934, the National Youth Association was formed, comprising members of the Conservative Party who had broken away, under the leadership of Colonel Estroem. The movement has openly fascist tendencies, but its emblem is the swastika—distinct from the German version—combined with the Scandinavian symbol of the sun.

However, the three factions of the movement—named after their leaders, Lindholm, Furugaard, and Estroem—maintain close ties with German Nazism. The ties between the Estroem faction and Germany are reportedly the closest of all. In fact, this faction is reportedly led by Count Von Rosen, Göring's brother-in-law, according to information provided by Communist MP Karl Kilbom, editor-in-chief of the Swedish newspaper *Jolkets Dajblad*.

Colonel Estroem, however, is popular; he took part in the Finnish and Estonian wars against Bolshevism and served in the Persian gendarmerie; many army officers follow him.

The government has declared its intention to defend the democratic state against any attempt at transformation.

SWITZERLAND

Swiss Fascism is in its early stages; its leader is Colonel Arturo Fonjallaz, Commander of the Heimwehren; the movement's official organ is *Der Schweizer Fascist* (The Swiss Fascist), the first issue of which, with a print run of 50,000 copies, was published on October 12, 1933. The newspaper will be a weekly and printed in two editions: one in French, published in Lausanne, and one in German, published in Zurich. The first issue, sent to all prominent figures in the political, industrial, and social spheres, contains the party's platform, the aims of Fascism, and the program of the "Association for the Universality of Rome." It also included a brief reference to the Swiss nation founded on the battlefield of Sempach, intended to make clear the unequivocal stance that Fascism took regarding the Anschluss.

The movement led by Colonel Fonjallaz, in collaboration with Mr. Rezzonico, took the name "Fasci della Svizzera Italiana" and had its headquarters in Lugano; by February 1934, it had 300 members. At the end of 1933, a delegation from the Swiss Fascist Party, led by Colonel C. Fonjallaz and composed of Messrs. Bader and Helmer, traveled to Rome and was received by His Excellency the Head of Government.

The *Gazzetta di Losanna* defends the Fasci of Ticino against accusations of irredentism but criticizes them for the sympathy and admiration they show for the system of government of a foreign state.

In mid-January 1914, the Swiss Fascists, led by Engineer Rezzonico, gathered at a public venue in Melide, a few kilometers from Lugano, to establish a local chapter there. On January 24, 1934, the local headquarters of the Ticino Fascists was inaugurated in Locarno, with the participation of Fascists from Lugano. That night, a group of subversives and troublemakers engaged in hostile demonstrations. Engineer Rezzonico, leader of the Ticino Fascists, who was in Milan during the incidents, was stopped by the police in Chiasso and taken to Bellinzona, where, after a lengthy interrogation by the Public Prosecutor, he was released late at night.

At a meeting in Zurich, Fonjallaz made contact with Helmer, leader of the Heimwehren, and Huni, one of the Hitlerite leaders of the “National Front,” with the aim of combating Freemasonry—a move that has caused some dissent within the Fascist ranks, of which Rezzonico is a member. Rezzonico believes that the campaign against Freemasonry is doomed to failure unless it is well-directed.

According to Rezzonico, Helmer and the Heimwehren should join the Fascist movement by fully accepting its discipline and program, and the greatest danger lies in the press controlled by Freemasonry, which denounces the Fascists as traitors to the Fatherland.

Following the Fascist action in the Canton of Ticino, the Liberal Party split with the expulsion of its left-wing members, and a trend toward a Liberal-Conservative alliance emerged to counter the Socialists. The Ticino Fascists protested against the public order bill—later rejected by a popular referendum—which sought to restrict freedom of assembly and prohibit the carrying of weapons, thereby exposing the Fascists to isolated attacks.

Meanwhile, in January 1934, the first Swiss Fascio was formed in Milan under the presidency of Otto Buehler, president of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Milan. Mr. Arrigo Giambonino was appointed representative of the Swiss Fasci for Lombardy. Colonel Fonjallaz and his right-hand man, Nino Rezzonico, took part in the meeting. This initiative received the most lively coverage in the Swiss press.

It was highlighted that the Swiss Minister in Rome had done everything in his power to prevent it, as well as the fear that the Swiss Fasci in Italy would divide the Swiss communities and pit some of them against the diplomatic and consular authorities. “The intervention of Swiss citizens in Italy’s internal affairs” was also criticized. On January 24, 1934, the “Nouvelle Société Helvetique,” which brings together Swiss citizens in Italy and Germany, issued a strongly worded circular from Bern ridiculing Fonjallaz’s attempt.

Despite all this, a second Swiss Fascio was formed in Florence, and in January 1934 a third was established in Rome, composed of Swiss nationals residing in the capital. Fascist propaganda also intensified in Bologna and Emilia, with anti-Masonic appeals directed by Swiss leaders to their compatriots living in the region.

Mr. Tomarkin, who was in charge of the organization in central and southern Italy, affirmed at its inaugural meeting the universal value of the Fascist ideal, stating that it has a clear goal before it and that Swiss Fascism intends to operate within the framework of the Swiss Constitution and come to power to resolve the political and economic situation created by the current parliamentary system.

After the reading of a congratulatory telegram from Engineer Rezzonico, Deputy Head of the Swiss Fascist Federation, an agenda was drawn up stating, among other things, that Swiss Fascism is

“Mussolinian Fascism in the Roman sense.”

Within Ticino Fascism, however, Rezzonico’s work has been the subject of criticism, and the explanation given in the press regarding the need for Swiss Fasci in Italy—where the Swiss “can thus protect their economic interests and gain greater recognition”—has caused some stir. This materialistic explanation of a movement that should be inspired by higher ideals has provoked a crisis among the leadership.

Regarding the establishment of Swiss Fasci in Italy, the *Tribune de Lausanne* notes that Swiss communities abroad have nothing to gain by aligning themselves with the political banners of parties; but regarding a Federal Council resolution disapproving of the formation of these groups, the newspaper draws a comparison with the tolerance shown toward Swiss communists organized abroad, and toward foreigners organized in Switzerland, who openly take orders from Moscow without being disturbed. The “Luzerner Tageblatt” expresses a similar view.

Architect Fischer is organizing “National Socialism” in Switzerland, but it seems that the Fascist movement has more leeway than the Nazi movement, and that while recruitment is proceeding well for the former, the latter is limited to absorbing individuals of German origin and the few Swiss who fit that profile, whereas the Swiss majority is irritated by the Nazi methods employed in Austria and fears a system of German “Comitagi.”

Regarding the Swiss-Nazi groups that have emerged in Germany, the Berlin correspondent for the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” reports that these are, more precisely, an assault unit created within the National Socialist section of Berlin-Brandenburg, which, according to its leader, the Swiss May, aims to combat political corruption in Switzerland and, above all, Freemasonry and its ally, Judaism. Given the government’s opposition, Mr. May intends to launch an assault on Swiss positions from Germany, following thorough preparation. He also plans to carry out an intensive propaganda campaign among Swiss settlers in Danzig, the Hanseatic cities, Schleswig, Mecklenburg, Oldenburg, and Hanover, including through lectures to be given by Fischer.

The Swiss press foresees that a split will inevitably arise between Swiss Fascists and Swiss National Socialists and wonders whether the instigators of this undertaking fully realize the extreme delicacy of the situation in which Swiss Fascists in Italy will one day find themselves vis-à-vis Italian Fascism, and Swiss Nazis in Germany vis-à-vis the Brownshirts. In agreement with the Swiss Legations in Rome and Berlin, the Swiss Consulates in Italy and Germany have issued a circular to Swiss citizens residing in those two countries, advising them against joining the recently established fascist organizations.

Membership in such organizations, the circular states, would be inappropriate and likely to sow discord within the Swiss communities abroad.

However, in parallel with this action by the diplomatic and consular authorities, a legislative bill was made public in January 1934 that is to be debated in the Cantonal Grand Council; through this bill, the government intends to have the Canton of Fribourg recognize professional associations, which will be entrusted with the task of promoting and safeguarding the material and social interests of the various professional bodies and groups.

Meanwhile, the National Front’s newspaper *Die Front* in Zurich will become a daily starting April 1, and some time ago another National Front publication, *Grenzbote*, had already become a daily. These developments attest to the growing power of the National Front and the advance of fascism in

Switzerland.

The means to combat the current state of affairs, to carry out more effective propaganda, and to establish a new corporatist constitution have been strengthened.

HUNGARY

The three Hungarian social-nationalist groups, which have been at odds with one another, appear to be seeking unification. Count Festetich's stance suggests that he is preparing to assume leadership of the movement. In January 1934, a press release was issued announcing the formation of a "Directorate of the Hungarian Social-Nationalist Movement," whose members include, in addition to Deputy Mesko—who serves as its head—Count Fidel Palffy and Festetich. President Gombos's attacks are now directed primarily against the latter two, not so much because of their personal political importance, but because he fears that the financial support and prestige of these two magnates could give new impetus to the party, which—at least until now—due to a lack of cohesion, leadership, and prestige, has not been a significant factor in Hungarian politics. Two tendencies have so far emerged in the program of this social-nationalism: all-out war against the Jews and radical agrarian reform. I In a lecture by Prof. Bela Kovric on "Fascism and Hitlerism," organized by the Budapest Bar Association, the differences between the two movements were illustrated, culminating in their differing conceptions of the state, which for Hitler is a means of strengthening the race.

As for the aforementioned Count Palffy, he was one of the earliest advocates of Christian socialism and is also one of the leaders of "Actio Cattolica," despite being among the leaders of the "Hooked Cross Movement." As a social nationalist, he distinguished himself in organizing the peasants of Győr, a region where he owns estates. He has authored several publications on Hitler's Germany and is considered the most pro-German among the National Socialist leaders. An anti-Semitic extremist, he is less conciliatory than Mesko and Festetich. The Győr organization has a marching band and a storm trooper unit and is only formally part of the National Socialist movement.

USSR

Reports from Kharbin (Manchuria) indicate the growth of "Russki Fascism," led by an Executive Council whose secretary is General Rodzajeviky, a man of intellect and energy. The recruitment of young people is reportedly continuing actively throughout the region.

9. The Laval-Hoare Plan as observed by F. Suvich. (December 1935).

December 14—fourteenth E.F.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE HEAD OF GOVERNMENT

Critique of the proposal presented by France and Great Britain

The proposal fails to address three of the issues that we consider to be among the main points to be resolved:

- the territorial link between the two colonies;

- the disarmament of Abyssinia;

- the exploitation of mineral resources in areas not under Italian control.

The issue of territorial connection between the two colonies could even be deferred to a later date. However, it must remain an open question. We will need to discuss whether and how to raise it and whether, without prejudging the broader territorial issue, we should request the establishment of a railway connection at this time.

The issue of disarmament, on the other hand, must be addressed immediately, albeit as an amendment to the “Project of the Five” regarding the assistance regime for Abyssinia.

The issue of mineral exploitation in other regions could also be resolved on the sidelines of the negotiations through specific agreements with France and Great Britain, which would require the Negus’s consent.

I. Territorial Exchanges.

With regard to the points raised in the proposal, the following observations are made:

a) Tigray. We must demand the entire Tigray region as it was under our occupation in 1896; alternatively, the entire region currently under our occupation; we can without difficulty guarantee a special status for Aksum with specific safeguards for the Coptic faith; this is a concession that costs us little but can yield benefits in return, given the exaggerated importance being attached to this issue of Aksum.

b) Dankalia. It is unclear which territory is reserved for us; we should secure a line that runs from Macallé to Lake Gum in French Somalia, leaving Biru and Teru within our territory.

It is not out of the question that our request might find justification in the Franco-British draft, which proposes that Italian Dankalia border the Aussa River to the south. As for the Aussa, which is showing a willingness to submit, we should request its independence.

The Franco-British proposal speaks of a “border rectification,” whereas we must speak of a “border demarcation.”

c) Border between Somalia and the Ogaden. Here, too, we must speak of establishing the border rather than rectifying it. We may claim ownership of the entire basin of the rivers flowing into Italian Somalia. Although this request may seem justified, it is unlikely to be accepted. It will, however, serve as a bargaining chip.

d) Access to the sea for Ethiopia: It is clear that the entire structure of the project rests on this concession. Although the concession is a serious and difficult matter, it does not seem feasible to demand its abolition.

While, on the one hand, the cession of a port and a strip of land—in full ownership—may seem more appropriate when made on Italian territory because it is more easily controllable and could be more readily revoked in the future, on the other hand, such a concession makes the system of compensation more evident. For other reasons, the solution involving a port and corridor on British territory is highly undesirable. It would likely create a convergence of Anglo-Ethiopian interests that would greatly hinder our future expansion in Abyssinia. The lesser of two evils might be to resolve the issue on French territory, by ceding to Abyssinia a portion of the port of Djibouti or another nearby port, along with some form of cession or neutralization of the territory through which the railway runs.

One could also consider neutralizing the entire length of the railway, given that it is the natural route to the territories that would be reserved in southern Ethiopia.

In this regard, it is worth emphasizing once again our interest in increasing our stake in the railroad.

If we were to opt for a solution on Italian territory, we would need to seek to cede not the city of Assab but a portion of the bay, with a corridor running entirely through Italian territory. Appropriate measures could be requested to ensure communication between the two parts of our colony, which would thereby diminish the significance of the cession made. We could, at least as a negotiating tactic, propose the long-term lease of the corridor and the port. In any case, the port should be neutralized, and Abyssinia should be prohibited from establishing a naval base there.

II. Zone for Economic Expansion and Settlement.

As for the extent of the zone, it must be acknowledged that the area is considerable: it covers some 400,000 square kilometers, a significant portion of which consists of rich and fertile territories. However, some adjustments may be requested to better adapt to geographical conditions and to fully include regions such as Cafta and Gimma within the zone; it should also be examined whether to extend the request to the territories of Jambo, Uol-Iega, and Beni Sciangul.

The aspect of the plan that is problematic, however, is the organization of the zone. The relevant provisions are unclear; however, the interpretation appears to be as follows: the “Plan of the Five” remains in effect throughout Abyssinia, consisting of a chief advisor to the Emperor, to whom several other advisors reporting on the most important branches of the administration (Economy, Finance, Public Works, etc.) are subordinate. These advisors are responsible for the whole of Abyssinia according to a division of responsibilities based on subject matter.

For the reserved zone, on the other hand, a special organization will be created, headed by a Councilor —who may be Italian—who will coordinate the various services based on local jurisdiction. It appears, however, that security services are not to be entrusted to the special organization for the zone headed by the Italian Councilor, but rather to the general organization responsible for all of Abyssinia. The drawbacks of this system are clear. The principal Councilor (who, according to the Franco-British Plan, will be neither Italian, French, nor British), appointed by the Negus and the League of Nations, will likely assume the role of defender of rights and reformer of Abyssinia and will be in constant opposition to our tendency to establish a permanent foothold in the reserved zone and to extend our expansion into other zones as well.

The Italian Deputy Councilor (who, moreover, will also have to be appointed by the League of Nations and approved by the Negus) will be commanded and controlled by the Chief Councilor. The subordinate services will then be predominantly, though not exclusively, Italian; consequently, the non-Italian minority—especially if supported by the Chief Councilor—will in turn act as a check and an impediment to the free conduct of our activities.

For the plan to be considered, we must, in some form, have a free hand in organizing the reserved zone. This could be achieved either by entrusting the Chartered Company with all services, including security (always under the sovereignty of the Emperor and perhaps in the form of a delegation from the League of Nations' assistance organization), or by granting the organization responsible for the zone's services full authority—including public security—to be exercised under the sovereignty of the Negus, with the obligation to report directly to the League of Nations without any dependence on the Principal Councilor.

Other forms could also be explored.

Even if direct interference by the League of Nations in the reserved zone were eliminated, the Plan still has the very serious flaw of placing the entire Abyssinian complex in the hands of the League of Nations, which would serve as the best safeguard for Abyssinia itself against our expansionist actions and against any future military action on our part. However, at this stage, it does not seem possible to ensure that the Plan would be free from such League interference.

Examination of the proposal in relation to the overall situation

The Plan, as presented, is not sound and cannot be accepted; even if some of the reforms outlined above were introduced, it would not thereby become sound, but it could nevertheless be taken into consideration should it be decided to close the Ethiopian question for the time being, albeit with a non-totalitarian solution.

The decision clearly depends on an assessment of our military capabilities, the prospect of Abyssinia's disintegration, and the country's economic and financial resilience.

A defeat would likely lead to an oil embargo and our withdrawal from the League of Nations, and thus to difficulties in further negotiations on the collective treaty. In other words, our position would depend entirely on the success of military action.

SUVICH.

10. British Public Opinion and Italy in Two Reports (December 1935, January 1936).

REPORT BY DINO GRANDI.

London, December 27, 1935, fourteenth.

British public opinion and events from December 10 to 21, 1935.

Although the Christmas holidays have kept many political figures away from London, the events that took place from the 10th to the 21st of this month continue to be the topic of all discussions in the corridors of the House of Commons, in political clubs, in the City, in newspaper newsrooms, and at private gatherings. These discussions are kept particularly lively by the uncertain reports regarding the debate currently underway in the French National Assembly on foreign policy.

In anti-fascist and pro-sanctions circles, as well as in correspondence from Paris published in these liberal and Labour newspapers (P. Reynaud's articles in *Paris Soir* have been extensively reprinted here), a phrase often recurs that is intended to define the events leading to Hoare's resignation, Baldwin's speech rejecting the Paris Pact, the vote in the House of Commons during the session of the 19th of U.S., and the subsequent appointment of Eden as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. All of this is defined as "the victory of public opinion."

If by "public opinion" one means the parliamentary demagoguery of Westminster, then the definition is accurate. But if by "public opinion" one means the instinct and widespread sentiment of the broad masses of the British people, then this definition could not be more erroneous or more at odds with reality. This is not merely my objective assessment of the situation, but also the judgment of the most impartial observers of recent British domestic political events.

I have had occasion on several occasions to state and explain (most recently in my letters to the Duce dated September 19 and October 25) that, up until early September of this year, the vast majority of the British masses remained indifferent to the Abyssinian question. The famous "Peace Ballot" of last June, as has been demonstrated on several occasions in the debates that took place in the House of Commons and the House of Lords on this subject (sessions of October 22–23–24 and December 19 in the Commons and the Lords), had no connection whatsoever with the international situation that had arisen following the outbreak of the Abyssinian Question.

It therefore signified only the desire for peace of 12 million British citizens, and this desire for peace was expressed in the generic and simplistic formula of adherence to the principles of the League of Nations. The results of the "Peace Ballot" were exploited by politicians, anti-fascists, and fanatics of the "League of Nations Union," liberals, and Labor members in general to confine the Abyssinian Question within the rigid and dead-end framework of the League of Nations—primarily with the aim of placing the Conservative government, on the eve of the elections, in a dead-end situation, or at the very least in a precarious and difficult position both domestically and internationally. This initial phase of

the British stance toward the Abyssinian Question is all too well known, and I have reported on it so often and at such length that it is unnecessary to dwell on it further.

And by the end of August—or rather, in early September—following the failure of the Tripartite talks in Paris and Hoare's speech to the Geneva Assembly, the defensive measures taken by Italy in the Mediterranean, and the dispatch of the British fleet to Gibraltar, to Malta and Alexandria, the Abyssinian Question became more directly an Italian-British issue and, as such, began to stir the deep-seated sentiments of British public opinion—or, to be more precise, the sentiments of the British masses. Those who have stirred up and exacerbated this popular sentiment against Fascist Italy—far more than the anti-Fascist groups themselves and far more than the propaganda of the organizations—were: Downing Street, for reasons of domestic electoral politics, and the Foreign Office, for reasons of foreign policy, in which, as Your Excellency is aware, the Abyssinian Question featured only as a secondary and indirect motive and objective. In mid-October, as Your Excellency recalls and as I described in my letter to the Duce dated October 13, tensions had reached such a point that something irreparable seemed imminent. There were many factors of various kinds that, at that moment, brought about a sudden change in the situation. I will not enumerate them now, as Your Excellency is perfectly familiar with them. But it is certain that if the Conservative government suddenly found itself faced with the need to modify its tactic of a frontal attack against Italy and to adopt instead the tactic of offering friendship (a tactic that lasted from mid-October until the very day of the general election, namely November 14), this was due largely to the sudden realization that the British masses, in their sure instinct, were coming to see that the Conservative Government's policy was leading England directly into war—that is, precisely the opposite result of what the British masses intended to achieve through their support for the Geneva policy (Peace Ballot) and the sanctions policy. The "friendship offensive," which began with the assurances given to the Duce by Drummond (on October 18 and continued until the day of the general election), had, as I have explained on several occasions (and particularly in my letter of October 25 to the Duce), three objectives:

1) to allay the sudden unease among the masses on the eve of the elections;

2) to convince Italy to accept an undue expansion of its defense system in the Mediterranean (Mediterranean "détente");

3) to decide on the sanctions in Geneva, thereby avoiding at that time an overly hostile Italian reaction against England, while proceeding to implement the sanctions on November 18, three days after the elections.

To interpret today the events that led to Hoare's resignation, the rejection of the Paris Bases, and Eden's appointment as a victory for public opinion is a claim that runs counter to the most basic truth.

The British masses want nothing to do with a "corporate war" today, just as they wanted nothing to do with it in October. This in no way means that the British masses would not be ready—as they were in September, when the specter of the Mediterranean Question and the alleged Italian threat to British imperial interests suddenly loomed before the suspicious British mind—to fight to the bitter end if they believed, or were led to believe, that the interests of Britain and the Empire were at stake. That is why it is necessary for us to closely monitor and neutralize Eden's maneuver (see my telegram of yesterday, No. 0416), which in recent days appears identical to the one he carried out on his return from Paris toward the end of August: namely, to shift the

the Ethiopian Question onto the delicate and dangerous terrain of a "Mediterranean Question" that does

not exist, but which I would not be surprised if Eden were to attempt to resurrect once more, in order to mobilize—in support of his policy of defending the League of Nations and imperial interests—the sentiments of the masses and of the imperialist and right-wing political currents that have so far been wary of him. On this point, which I consider essential for the future developments of the situation, I take the liberty of bringing it to the Duce's personal attention.

As the days go by, it becomes increasingly clear that Hoare was the victim of a parliamentary intrigue, and that the victory of public opinion was nothing other than the victory of parliamentary demagoguery, which has gradually gained ground in all sectors of the House of Commons

In my letter of the 20th of this month to the Duce, I outlined the various lines of parliamentary action that have been directed against Hoare. The Hoare-Laval Bill provoked the most vigorous opposition within the Cabinet from Eden and the members of the Government who have consistently supported him thus far (the "Young Turks," as they are called in London). But Baldwin has managed to prevail over the dissenting faction within the Cabinet, so much so that during the session on the 10th, Eden himself—albeit reluctantly—resolved to defend, on behalf of the absent Hoare, the Paris Bill against the opposition's attacks. It should also be noted that the much-criticized telegram to Sir Sidney Barton (published in the "White Paper") was sent from London on December 10, when both Hoare and Vansittart were absent, and Eden was acting head of the Foreign Office.

The second maneuver carried out by the Liberal-National group within the majority was also, after a few days, dominated by Baldwin, who succeeded in securing Simon—leader of the National-Liberal group—to endorse the Paris Bases and the government's policy.

What ultimately decided the fate of Hoare and his proposal, however, was the suddenly hardened and intransigent stance of a large section of the left-wing Conservatives led by Sir Austen Chamberlain—the "Carlton Club conspirators," as everyone in London now calls them.

As I reported in my telegram No. ' of this month, the left-wing Conservatives met for the first time on the 2nd and decided to postpone determining their position pending Hoare's statements. In the early afternoon of the 18th, the Left-wing Conservatives met again and decided to immediately present Baldwin with an ultimatum: they would vote confidence in the Government only if the Government appeared before the House of Commons the following day with a formal declaration withdrawing the Paris Bill and a solemn admission of the error committed. Baldwin yielded to the ultimatum from the left-wing Conservatives and asked Hoare to amend, in the manner they requested, the statements Hoare was preparing—statements that had already been approved in broad outline by the Prime Minister the previous evening. Hoare refused to appear before the House of Commons in the role of a repentant and penitent figure and chose instead to resign in order to defend his policy from his seat in the House.

I am enclosing, for the Duce's information, a memo containing data and facts that I personally gathered on the 18th—data that confirm the chronological sequence of events, which, in any case, is now in the public domain and is no longer the subject of any debate whatsoever.

Public opinion, therefore, played no part in Hoare's downfall. The reasons for his downfall lie within Parliament and do not stem from the sentiments of the country. Proof of this is the regret and sympathy that British public opinion expressed toward Hoare in the aftermath of his downfall. Everyone agrees that, since the 19th, only one person has emerged from the debate with his stature enhanced: Hoare himself. All of this is far from irrelevant to the political events that will unfold in the coming weeks, and it is further proof that the British public remained entirely uninvolved in the parliamentary events

of December 18 and 19.

What will Baldwin's and Eden's policy be now? All the level-headed and sensible elements in the country agree that Hoare's policy was the only one that served Britain's interests and the interests of peace. But everyone is equally in agreement that the logic of the situation will make it difficult—if only for a certain period of time—for Baldwin and Eden to resume Hoare's policy, even if they wished to do so; a policy that Baldwin has solemnly rejected and against which Eden was appointed to lead British foreign policy. The less pessimistic insist that Baldwin and Eden, driven by a sense of international reality, a sober assessment of British interests, and the prevailing sentiments of the country, will sooner or later have to return to the path charted by Hoare. But they add that they do not know how or when it will be possible for Baldwin and Eden to do so without risking a parliamentary situation even more critical than the one that did not materialize last week. Hope therefore rests on a new development.

And this new development is expected to consist of:

1) effective French resistance to the imposition of further sanctions;

2) a decisive advance by Italian troops in Abyssinia.

While awaiting these developments—which, in the opinion of many, would extricate Baldwin and Eden's policy from its current difficulties and allow for a reassessment of the situation and a substantial return to Hoare's policy—moods remain doubtful, anxious, and in limbo. The announcement of the Hoare-Laval proposals on December 10 infuriated Parliament and satisfied the nation.

The vote in the House of Commons on December 19, by which Baldwin's government surrendered to the demagoguery of Westminster, satisfied Parliament but created a sense of dread among the British people.

REPORT FROM THE NAVAL ATTACHÉ IN LONDON

London, January 3, 1936-XIV

Subject: British stance on the A.O. issue

1) The situation here, following the great uproar caused by the Anglo-French proposal to settle the Italian-Ethiopian conflict, is one of stagnation.

The Christmas holidays came at just the right time to divert public attention from the Abyssinian issue and channel it toward other, more welcome pursuits.

Although the vast majority of newspapers never miss an opportunity to cast every Italian action regarding the Italian-Abyssinian issue in the worst possible light, there is nevertheless a noticeable weariness regarding the conflict and a certain tendency to now focus on other topics. Nevertheless, the

Anglo-French peace proposal has elicited some curious reactions among the public. Hoare's speech in the House of Commons presented the public with an aspect of the truth that had not been revealed to the public before the elections.

Faced with this account, a segment of that public—which had been vociferously demanding the uncompromising and complete application of League principles—was left disoriented; and the criticism leveled at the proposed resolution of the Italian-Ethiopian conflict is not constructive, as it merely repeats with emphasis the well-known, hackneyed, and utopian principles without taking into account our actual occupation of Abyssinia, of our resistance and our determination to see this through to the end, as well as our ability to do so.

2) A certain segment of public opinion, under the immediate influence of the Anglo-French proposal and Hoare's speech, has hardened its stance and is demanding the application of sanctions to the bitter end, even at the risk of provoking a war in the Mediterranean. There are those (Lord Cecil, Liberals, Laborites) who argue that the more explicit the military agreements between the Allied powers are, the less likely an Italian military response in the Mediterranean will be. Others, on the other hand (usually military officers and some imperialists), are convinced that a conflict in the Mediterranean would be confined to that area without spreading and escalating into a European conflagration, and that in any case this would resolve, at least for a certain time, the problem of the security of imperial communications with the East.

If we wish to make a distinction by social class, we can say—roughly speaking and to the extent that such classifications are possible—that among the lower class there is marked indifference toward the Italian-Abyssinian conflict; people are more concerned with domestic issues, and only among those who harbor anti-fascist animosity does any interest in the matter appear. Among the middle class, hostility toward Italy is nearly universal, fueled by countless preexisting prejudices and by the newspapers. Among the upper class, the situation is much the same, but there is perhaps a greater tendency among more enlightened individuals—who are not blinded by this wave of fanaticism and unhealthy mysticism—to see the situation for what it really is.

It is obvious that behind these manifestations of hostility toward Italian expansion—since even the press is now beginning to drop the mask and speak a little more about Italian expansionism and a little less about Abyssinia—there are powerful groups of people exerting pressure on the government and public opinion.

Among these groups, the arms industry—and primarily Vickers—is said to be the most prominent.

As is well known, the Anglican Church joins these groups in a highly effective manner; it views Italian Abyssinia as a vast field of expansion for the Catholic Church in Africa at its own expense and, furthermore, seeks to take advantage of the current crisis to position itself as the "leader" of the (non-Catholic) Christian denominations in Europe (see the Archbishop of Canterbury's New Year's message to the Christian Churches in Europe).

What is now clearly emerging from the burial of the peace plan is the Franco-British political-military agreement—that is, the reestablishment of the "Entente Cordiale," which for years has been a fervent desire of the Foreign Office (Vansittart, etc.). According to the press, naval arrangements for coordinated action in the Mediterranean in the event of an Italian offensive have been in place since October, while negotiations regarding the Army and Air Force reportedly began only on December 10. However, it is noted that these armed forces require a different approach from that of the Navy, which

is always ready.

In fact, it remains to be seen what arrangements will be made regarding the deployment of the French Army along the Alpine border and British assistance in replacing these troops along the Rhine; furthermore, arrangements for the use of airfields in France by British aircraft must be finalized. There are many indications that the Anglo-French agreement on naval matters is well advanced, including those referred to in Note No. 344 of December 30 from the Naval Attaché in Paris and what the undersigned reported in Note No. 80/S of December 27 to Maristat. In any case, whatever agreements may have been reached between France and England, it is clear that once the Italo-Ethiopian conflict has ended, Great Britain will face a dilemma: either to continue regarding Italy as a potential enemy, with all the consequent risks in the Mediterranean, or to draw Italy into a Franco-Italian-British alliance for the security of Europe—that is, the Stresa Front must be reconstituted.

Meanwhile, news has arrived that the Lloyd's Committee has reduced the insurance premium for cargoes transiting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea from 5/6% to 3/4%, while the premium on shipments of bullion remains unchanged at 2/6.

4) The Admiralty is being very tight-lipped, and it is difficult to obtain any reliable information regarding the Mediterranean issue.

I sought an opportunity to have a friendly conversation with the Vice Admiral, Deputy Chief of Staff and member of the Board, and I briefly summarize here the main points of the conversation and the impressions I gained.

I tried to broach the subject by asking why England persisted in believing that we Italians intended to attack them. In asking this question, I wanted to test the waters regarding the recent Franco-British naval agreements.

The Admiral replied with these exact words: "We had to send ships to the Mediterranean and take all necessary precautions so as not to be caught off guard. When, as in your case, there is a dictator—a single man in command—and when there is no way to foresee or detect what might happen, since the most serious decisions depend on the will of a single man, we have no choice but to take precautions in advance.

"Let us suppose," he continued, "purely for the sake of argument, that we consider the following three scenarios:

a) that an oil embargo is imposed;

b) that military uprisings occur in Abyssinia;

c) that the financial situation in Italy is such as to give rise to the gravest concerns, to the point of having to abandon the campaign in Africa in whole or in part.

"These three scenarios," he said, "could occur simultaneously. As for the oil embargo, it is likely there would be no immediate reaction; however, in any case, the Admiralty believes that if one or more of these scenarios were to materialize, they could provoke, sooner or later, as a last desperate act on Italy's part, an armed reaction against England." The Admiral made it clear to me that the greatest concern was for Egypt.

“Under these circumstances,” he continued, “it is absolutely necessary that we remain prepared for any eventuality.”

When I asked him how long he thought we would have to remain in this state of tension, he replied, more or less as follows: “We hope the matter will be settled soon, since we cannot continue much longer in this manner without ordering mobilization; and then, as you can understand, the situation will take on a far more serious aspect. The Admiralty has told the Foreign Office that, for these reasons, a settlement must be reached as soon as possible.”

To try to get some more precise facts, I asked him if he thought the situation would continue in this manner until the rainy season, that is, around June, but he declined to comment on specific dates nor did he wish to make any mention of Franco-British naval cooperation in the Mediterranean.

6) When I expressed my personal opinion that, from the British perspective, it did not seem at all necessary to reinforce the fleet in the Mediterranean—since the fleet present there in August was sufficient to counter the Italian fleet, given that the latter lacks battleships—he responded as follows: The Admiralty had deemed it necessary to reinforce, in particular, the light vessels and the 10,000-metric-ton cruisers; furthermore, it attached great importance to the air force—an importance that he personally questioned to some extent. Indeed, he added jokingly, “It would have been a good opportunity to settle once and for all the famous and controversial question of the air force versus the battleship.”

7) Throughout the entire conversation, he refused to admit that the dispatch of the Home Fleet and other reinforcements was motivated by a desire to intimidate. The Admiral also stated that there had never been any desire on the part of the British Government or the Admiralty to provoke a war against Italy. He admitted that there were undoubtedly some among the ultra-nationalists and proponents of sanctions who might have desired such an outcome, but that such a solution had never been considered by the responsible British authorities. He expressed the opinion that the sanctions would not be tightened.

8) When I asked him for his opinion regarding what might be expected once the crisis was over—namely, whether Italy would always be considered a potential enemy by Britain or whether there would be a Franco-Italian-British agreement— the Admiral replied that much depended on events, but that, whereas before the Italo-Ethiopian conflict a war with Italy had been absolutely ruled out by the British General Staff, from now on Italy would have to be considered a potential enemy so as not to be caught off guard as had happened last September.

9) In conclusion, nothing has essentially changed for the time being, and one gets the impression that, for now, there is no sign of a reduction in the British fleet in the Mediterranean or a return to normal conditions until the political issue regarding the Italian-Abyssinian crisis has been resolved in some way. The impression here is that, at this point, the future and the resolution of the issue are influenced solely by the military situation in East Africa; nor does it seem possible to harbor any illusions about a more favorable reception of our position or, more generally, about a wave of sympathy for our aspirations until some decisive military success is achieved on the battlefield.

The Hague, July 10–11, 1932.

END.

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